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ALL MEN ARE GHOSTS

L. P. JACKS

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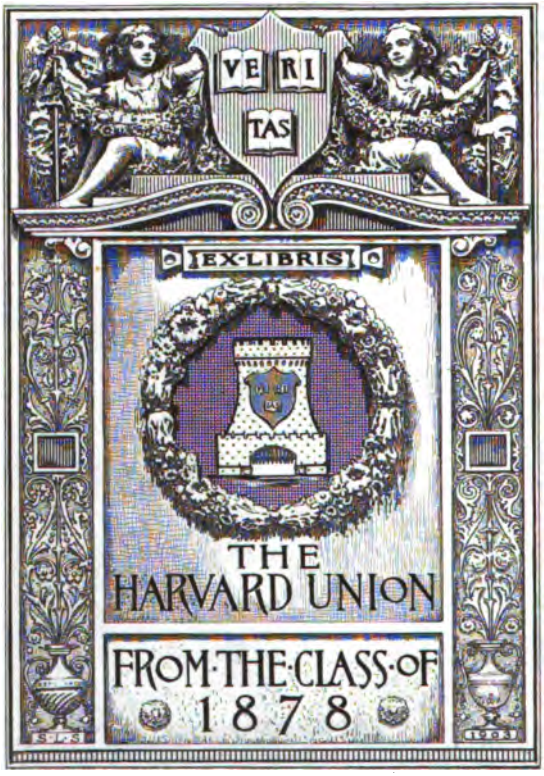

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BY

L. P. JACKS

AUTHOR OF
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"THE ALCHEMY OF THOUGHT"

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CONTENTS

PANHANDLE AND THE GHOSTS: PAGE

I. PANHANDLE LAYS DOWN A PRINCIPLE . . 1

II. PANHANDLE NARRATES HIS HISTORY AND DESCRIBES THE HAUNTED HOUSE . . . 9

III. PANHANDLE'S REMARKABLE ADVENTURE. THE GHOST APPEARS 38

THE MAGIC FORMULA 54

ALL MEN ARE GHOSTS:

I. DR PIECRAFT BECOMES CONFUSED . . . 102

II. "THE HOLE IN THE WATER-SKIN" . . . 140

III. DR PIECRAFT CLEARS HIS MIND . . . 200

THE PROFESSOR'S MARE 208

FARMER JEREMY AND HIS WAYS . . . 279

WHITE ROSES 337

Of the stories in this volume, "Farmer Jeremy and his Ways" has already appeared in the *Cornhill*; "The Magic Formula," "The Professor's Mare," and "White Roses" in the *Atlantic Monthly*. These are reprinted with the permission of the respective Editors. Some additions have been made which were precluded by the shorter form of the magazine story.

"He that hath found some fledged bird's nest
may know,
At first sight, if the bird be flown;
But what fair well or grove he sings in now,
That is to him unknown.

And yet, as angels in some brighter dreams
Call to the soul while man doth sleep;
So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted
themes,
And into glory peep."

HENRY VAUGHAN, 1655.

ALL MEN ARE GHOSTS

PANHANDLE AND THE GHOSTS

"'Oh,' dissi lui, 'Or se' tu ancor morto?'
Ed egli a me, 'Come il mio corpo stea
Nel mondo su, nulla scienza porto.'"
DANTE, *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII.

I

"THE first principle to guide us in the study of the subject," said Panhandle, "is that no genuine ghost ever recognised itself as what you suppose it to be. The conception which the ghost has of its own being is fundamentally different from yours. Because it lacks solidity you deem it less real than yourself. The ghost thinks the opposite. You imagine that its language is a squeak. From the ghost's point of view the squeaker is yourself. In short, the attitude of mankind towards the

realm of ghosts is regarded by them as a continual affront to the majesty of the spiritual world, perpetrated by beings who stand on a low level of intelligence; and for that reason they seldom appear or make any attempt at open communication, doing their work in secret and disclosing their identity only to selected souls. Far from admitting that they are less real than you, they regard themselves as possessed of reality vastly more intense than yours. Imagine what your own feelings would be if, at this moment, I were to treat you as a gibbering bogey, and you will then have some measure of the contempt which ghosts entertain for human beings."

"You must confess, my dear Panhandle," I answered, "that you are flying in the face of the greatest authorities, and have the whole literature of the subject against you. You tell me that no genuine ghost ever recognised itself as such."

"I mean, of course," interrupted Panhandle, "that it never recognised itself as a ghost in your inadequate sense of the term."

"Then," said I, "what do you make of the Ghost's words in *Hamlet*:

'I am thy father's spirit'?

This one, at all events, recognised itself as such."

"In attributing those words to the Ghost," said Panhandle, "Shakespeare was using him as a stage property and as a means of playing to the gallery, which is incapable of right notions on this subject. But there is another passage in the same group of scenes which shows that Shakespeare was not wholly ignorant of the inner mind of ghosts. Listen to this:—

'*Enter Ghost.*

Horatio. What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? By Heaven I charge thee, speak!

Marcellus. It is offended.

Bernardo. See, it stalks away.'"

"Now, what does that mean?" he continued. "The words of Horatio imply that the Ghost has *usurped* a reality which does not belong

to him; that he is a wraith, a goblin, or some such absurdity—that, in short, he is going to be treated in the idiotic manner which is usual with men in the presence of such apparitions. Doubtless the Ghost saw that these men were afraid of him, that their hair was standing on end and their knees knocking together. Disgusted at such an exhibition of what to him would appear as a mixture of stupidity and bad manners, he turned up his nose at the lot of them and stalked away in wrath. No self-respecting ghost would ever consent to be so treated; and that may help you to understand why communications from the world of spirits are comparatively rare. Ghosts who believe in the existence of human beings often regard them as idiots. To communicate with such imbeciles is to court an insult, or at least to expose the communicating spirit to an exhibition of revolting antics and limited intelligence. From their point of view, men are a race of beings whose acquaintance is not worth cultivating."

"Your words imply," I said, "that some of

the ghosts do not believe in our existence at all."

"The majority are of that mind," he answered. "Belief in the existence of beings like yourself is regarded among them as betokening a want of mental balance. A ghost who should venture to assert that you, for example, were real would certainly risk his reputation, and if he held a scientific professorship or an ecclesiastical appointment he would be sneered at by his juniors and made the victim of some persecution. I may tell you incidentally that the ghosts have among them a Psychical Research Society which has been occupied for many years in investigating the reality of the inhabitants of this planet. By the vast majority of ghosts the proceedings of the Society are viewed with indifference, and the claim, which is occasionally made, that communication has been established with the beings whom we know as men is treated with contempt. The critics point to the extreme triviality of the alleged communications from this world.

They say that nothing of the least importance has ever come through from the human side, and are wont to make merry over the imbecility and disjointed nonsense of the messages reported by the mediums; for you must understand that there are mediums on that side as well as on this. I happen to know of two instances. Some time ago two questions, purporting to come from this world, reached the ghosts. One was, 'What will be the price of Midland Preferred on January 1, 1915?' The other, 'Will it be a boy or a girl?' For months a committee of ghostly experts has been investigating these communications, the meaning of which proved at first sight utterly unintelligible in that world. The matter is still undecided; but the conclusion most favoured at the moment is that the messages are garbled quotations from an eminent poet among the ghosts. Meanwhile more than one great reputation has been sacrificed and the sceptics are jubilant."

"As you speak, Panhandle," I said, "it suddenly occurs to me, with a kind of shock,

that at this moment these beings may be investigating the reality of my own existence. It would be interesting if I could find out what they suppose me to be."

"I doubt if the knowledge would flatter you," he answered. "It is highly probable that you would hear yourself interpreted in lower terms than even the most malicious of your enemies could invent. A friend of mine, who is a Doctor of Science, and extremely scornful as to the existence of spirits, is actually undergoing that investigation by the ghosts the results of which, if applied to yourself, you would find so interesting. Some assert that he is a low form of mental energy which has managed to get astray in the universe. Others declare that he is a putrid emanation from some kind of matter which science has not yet identified, without consciousness, but by no means without odour. They allege that they have walked through him."

At this point of the conversation I suddenly remembered a question which I had several times had on the tip of my tongue to ask.

"Panhandle," I said, "you seem to be on a familiar footing with the ghosts. How did you acquire it?"

"Ah, my friend," he replied, "the answer to that is a long story. Come down to my house in the country, stay a fortnight, and I promise to give you abundant material for your next book."

II

PANHANDLE NARRATES HIS HISTORY AND DESCRIBES THE HAUNTED HOUSE

PANHANDLE's residence was situated in a remote part of the country, and at this moment I have no clear recollection of the complicated journey, with its many changes at little-known junctions, which I had to make in order to find my friend.

The residence stood in the midst of elevated woodlands, and was well hidden by the trees. An immense sky-sign, standing out high above all other objects and plainly visible to the traveller from whatever side he made his approach, had been erected on the roof. The sky-sign carried the legend "No Psychologists!" It turned with the wind, gyrating continually, and when darkness fell the letters were outlined in electric lamps. Only a blind man could miss the warning.

This legend was repeated over the main entrance to the grounds, with the addition of the word "Beware!" I thought of man-traps and ferocious dogs, and for some minutes I stood before the gates, wondering if it would be safe for me to enter. At last, remembering how several friends had assured me that I was "no psychologist," I concluded that little harm awaited me, plucked up my courage, and boldly advanced.

Beyond the gates I found the warning again repeated with a more emphatic truculence and a finer particularity. At intervals along the drive I saw notice-boards projecting from the barberries and the laurels, each with some new version of the original theme. "*Death to the Psychology of Religion*" were the words inscribed on one. The next was even more precise in its application, and ran as follows:—

"*Inquisitive psychologists take notice!*
Panhandle has a gun,
And will not hesitate to shoot."

Somewhat shaken I approached the front door and was startled to see a long, glittering thing suddenly thrust through an open window in the upper storey; and the man behind the weapon was unquestionably Panhandle himself. "Can it be," I said aloud, "that Panhandle has taken me for an inquisitive psychologist?"

"Advance," cried my host, who had a keen ear for such undertones. "Advance and fear nothing." A moment later he grasped me warmly by the hand, "Welcome, dearest of friends," he was saying. "You have arrived at an opportune moment. The house is full of guests who are longing to meet you."

"But, Panhandle," I expostulated as we stood on the doorstep, "I understood we were to be alone. I have come for one purpose only, that you might explain your familiarity with—with *those people.*"

I used this expression, rather than one more explicit, because the footman was still present, knowing from long experience how dangerous it is to speak plainly about

metaphysical realities in the hearing of the proletariat.

"Those very people are now awaiting you," said Panhandle, as he drew me into the library. "I will be quite frank with you at once. *This house is haunted*; and if on consideration you find your nerves unequal to an encounter with ghosts, you had better go back at once, for there is no telling how soon the apparitions will begin."

"I have been longing to see a ghost all my life," I answered; "and now that the chance has come at last, I am not going to run away from it. But I confess that with the encounter so near at hand my knees are not as steady as I could wish."

"A turn in the open air will set that right," said he, "and we will take it at once; for I perceive an indication that the first ghost has already entered the room and is only waiting for your nerves to calm before presenting himself to your vision."

I bolted into the garden, and Panhandle, with an irritating smile at the corners of his

mouth, followed. As we walked among the lawns and shrubberies we both fell silent: he, for a reason unknown to me; I, because something in his plan of gardening had absorbed my attention and filled me with wonder. Presently I said, "Panhandle, I cannot refrain from asking you a question. I observe that in your style of gardening you have embodied an idea which I have long cherished but never dared to carry out lest people should think me morbid. You have planted cypress at the back of your roses; and the plan is so unusual and yet so entirely in accord with my own mind on the subject that I suspect telepathy between you and me."

He looked at me closely for a few seconds, and then said:

"It may be. I too have often suspected that throughout the whole of my gardening operations I was under the control of an intelligence other than my own. But I would never have guessed that it was yours. Anyhow, this particular idea, no matter what its origin may be, is admirable.

No other background will compare with the cypress for bringing out the colour of the roses. See how gorgeous they look at this moment."

"And the cypress too," I said, "are, thanks to the contrast, full of majesty. But, though you and I understand one another so completely at this point, there is another at which I confess you bewilder me." And I indicated the sky-sign, which at that moment had turned its legend—"No Psychologists"—full towards us.

"You will not be surprised to learn," he answered, "that this house, like other haunted houses, has been the scene of a tragedy. The tragedy is the explanation of the sign, and it is essential you should know the story, as the ghosts are certain to refer to it. You remember that I once had a religion?"

"I trust you have one still," I said.

"I prefer to be silent on that point," he answered. "Whatever religion I may have at the present moment I am resolved

to protect from the disasters which befell the religion I had long ago. A certain psychologist got wind of it, and I, in my innocence, granted his request to submit my religious consciousness to a scientific investigation. I was highly flattered by the result. The man, having completed his investigation, came to the conclusion that my religion was destined to be *the religion of the future*, and went up and down the country announcing his prophecy. But the strange thing was that as soon as we all knew that this was going to be the religion of the future it ceased to be the religion of the present. What followed? Why, in a couple of years I and my followers had no religion at all. Incidentally our minds had become a mass of self-complacency and conceit, and the public were coming to regard us as a set of intolerable wind-bags. Such was the tragedy, and ever since its occurrence I have led a haunted life."

"There may be compensations in that," I suggested.

"There are, and I am resolved to main-

tain them. This house and these grounds are kept as a strict preserve for spirits of every denomination; and you will understand the severity of my measures for their protection when I tell you that the slightest taint of an earth-born psychology in the atmosphere, or the footprint of one of its exponents on the greensward, would instantly cause a general exodus of my ghostly visitors, and thus deprive me of the company which is at once the solace and the inspiration of my declining years. On all such intrusions I decree the penalty of death, being fully determined that no psychology shall pollute this neighbourhood until such time as the ghosts, having completed a psychology of their own, are able to protect themselves. I assure you that my intercourse with the spirits more than makes amends for all that I lost when my former religion was destroyed."

"Which never became the religion of the future after all?" I asked, more sarcastically perhaps than was quite decent.

"Of course not. And the same cause, if suffered to operate, will prevent anything else from becoming the religion of the future. It is one of the signs of decadence in the present age that livelihoods should be procurable by the scientific analysis of religion. Had I the power, I would make it a penal offence to publish the results of such inquiries. As it is, we must protect ourselves. Arm, therefore, my friend—arm yourself with the like of this; and whenever you see one of those marauders, do not hesitate to shoot! The only good psychologist is a dead one."

As Panhandle said this, he drew from his pocket quite the most formidable six-shooting pistol I have ever seen.

I was about to protest against the atrocious obscurantism of this outburst, when my attention was caught by a strange sound of fluttering in the letters of the sky-sign above the house. Looking up, I saw to my amazement that the former legend had disappeared and a new one was gradually forming. "*Change the conversation,*" were

the words I read when the swaying letters had settled down into a position of rest. Immediately afterwards the letters fluttered again and the original legend reappeared. "Certainly," I said to myself, "this house is haunted."

Obedient to the mandate of the fluttering letters, I began at once to cast about for an opening that would change the conversation. I could find none, and I was embarrassed by the pause. There was nothing for it but to break out suddenly on a new line. But in the sequel I was astonished to observe with what ease Panhandle, in spite of the violence of the transition, turned the conversation back to its original theme.

"My dear Panhandle," I said, "you are doubtless familiar with the remark of Charles Dickens to the effect that writers of fiction seldom *dream* of the characters they have created, the reason being that they know those characters to be unreal."

"I am perfectly familiar with the passage,"

he replied, "but I am astonished to hear it quoted by you. Have you not often insisted, in pursuance, I suppose, of the principles of your philosophy, that characters created by imaginative genius, such as Hamlet or Faust, possess a deeper reality than beings of flesh and blood? Did you not cite instances from Dickens himself and say that Sam Weller and Mr Micawber were more real to you than Louis XIV or George Washington?"

"I certainly said so, and adhere to the statement."

"Then you will not hesitate to admit that a character who is more real than George Washington is at least as capable of being interested in the problem of his own creation as George Washington could have been."

"You are leading me into a trap," I replied.

"I am only requiring you to be in earnest. Like many persons who express the opinion you have just reiterated, you have never taken the trouble to realise what it implies.

But I will now show you its implications. Nor could a better means be found of introducing the revelations I am about to make as to what you may expect in this haunted house. It was your good genius who led you to this topic. You will learn presently that the phenomena peculiar to my house are entirely in harmony with your own philosophy on this point, that philosophy being, as I understand, some new brand of Idealism."

"I desire you to proceed with the revelations immediately," I said. "We live in an age which abhors introductions as fiercely as Nature abhors a vacuum, and I beg you to leave it with me to adjust what you are about to deliver to the principles of my philosophy."

"Know, then," said Panhandle, with a readiness that marked his approval of my attitude, "that your opinion as to the reality of these imaginary characters is entirely sound. Many of them are in the habit of haunting this very house, and I think it extremely

probable that some will put in an appearance to-night. You have quoted Charles Dickens to the effect that their creators know them to be unreal — a remarkable error for so gifted a man. But it may astonish you to learn that they return the compliment by having no belief in the reality of their reputed creators. It is more than possible, after what you have said, that Mr Micawber, who has now become a philosopher, will appear to you during your stay in the house. Tell him by way of experiment that his creator was a certain Charles Dickens. You will find that he wholly fails to understand what you mean. He regards himself as a fortuitous concourse of ideas. Only this morning I tried the same experiment on Colonel Newcome. I told him all about Thackeray, who, said I, was the author of his being.[1] He was utterly amazed, and just as

[1] "In the novel of *Pendennis*, written ten years ago, there is an account of a certain Costigan, whom I had invented. . . . I was smoking in a tavern-parlour one night, and this Costigan came into the room alone—the very man: the most remarkable resemblance of the printed

incredulous as it is possible for so perfect a gentleman to be. He accused me of talking metaphysics."

My long acquaintance with Panhandle had schooled me to betray no astonishment at anything he might say. So, assuming as cool an air as I could command, I merely asked:

"Would you mind telling me, Panhandle, by what means you have managed to ascertain the views of these gentlemen concerning their creator?"

"Like yourself," he answered, "I was convinced long ago that the creations of genius, Hamlet and the rest, are more

sketches of the man, and of the rude drawings in which I had depicted him. He had the same little coat, the same battered hat, cocked on one eye, the same twinkle in that eye. 'Sir,' said I, knowing him to be an old friend whom I had met in unknown regions, 'sir,' I said, 'may I offer you a glass of brandy and water?' . . . How had I come to know him, to divine him? Nothing shall convince me that I have not seen that man in the world of spirits." (Thackeray, *De Finibus.*) See the whole passage, from which it is evident that Costigan did not recognise his creator.

real than the Johns, Toms, and Marys who seem to walk the earth. But, unlike you, I have not been content that so important a truth should remain at the level of a mere elegant opinion. By a course of spiritual exercises carefully devised, into which I shall presently initiate you, I have placed myself in direct communication with these personalities; and so successful has the discipline proved, that intelligent intercourse has become possible between them and me. I frequently invite them to haunt the house, and the response is always favourable. I am on terms of intimacy with the principal characters of the Classic Drama, of Shakespeare, Goethe, and many eminent novelists of modern times."

On hearing this all my efforts to keep cool broke down.

"Panhandle," I cried, "you must initiate me into those exercises without a moment's delay."

"Be patient," he replied, "until you have heard the further results to which they will

lead. I have not yet told you the half, and it may be that when you have heard the rest you will prefer to have no part in these Mysteries. The realm to which they will lead you has an immense population of ghosts; it is vastly more populous than our planet; and notwithstanding that my exercises have brought me abundant knowledge of them and their doings, I have not been able to classify more than a small portion of the inhabitants. The characters created by imaginative genius are only one among the orders of ghosts to whom you will presently be introduced. You will be haunted by *Ideas* in every variety, all of them living organisms of high complexity, and all more or less ignorant of whence they come or whose they are. Possibly you will encounter your own ideas among them; and I must warn you against claiming to be the author of any of them, even the most original. There is nothing that offends them more deeply. They have their own notions as to their origin, which they conceive to lie in something infinitely superior to the brain of a

being like yourself. By many of them their reputed authors are treated with contempt; some deny the existence of these 'authors' in any capacity whatsoever; others regard them as mere phrases, metaphors, or abstractions. A notable instance is that of your friend Professor Gunn, who wrote the famous treatise to prove the non-existence of God. The potent ideas projected in the course of that work had long enjoyed an independent being of their own in the spiritual world; and it may interest you—and Professor Gunn also, if you will be kind enough to tell him what I am now saying—to learn that these ideas of his have formed themselves into a congregation or society whose principal tenet is that there is no such being as Professor Gunn. They regard him alternatively as a sun-myth or an exploded fiction."

"How absurd!" I cried.

"In your present darkness," he answered, "the exclamation is to be excused. But I assure you that after passing one night in this house you will find that nothing in heaven or

earth is less absurd than the statement you have just heard."

"As to *your own* Ideas," he continued, "know that their relation to yourself is, in their eyes, widely different from what you conceive it to be. Between yourself and them there is the utmost divergence of view on this matter. Under no circumstances whatsoever will they consent to regard themselves as your *property*, and no claim of that kind, nor even the semblance of a claim, must ever be suffered to appear in your dealings with these ghosts. Remember that your common-sense is their metaphysic, and their metaphysic your common-sense; what you dream of, they see; what you see, they dream of; and the consequence is that many truths, which appear to you as the least certain of your conclusions, are used by them as the familiar axioms of thought. On the other hand, what are axioms to you are often problems to them. Your *cogito ergo sum*, for example, will not go down in the spiritual world. For just as you, on your side of the theory of knowledge,

are busy in trying to account for your Ideas, so they, on theirs, have much ado in their efforts to account for *you*; all of them find you the most illusive of beings, while some, as I have already hinted, deny your existence altogether, or treat you as a highly questionable hypothesis. With several of your leading Ideas I hope to make you personally acquainted this very night. To convince them of your identity will be no easy matter, and the most vigilant circumspection will be necessary on your part. I counsel an attitude of uttermost modesty; anything else is certain to give them the impression that you are an impostor. Betray, then, not the least surprise on finding yourself treated by your own Ideas as a being of little importance to their concerns. Above all, you must not expect them to take more than a passing interest in *your brain.* Your best course is to avoid all reference to that topic. 'The brain' is seldom, if ever, mentioned in the best circles of the spiritual world —to which circles, I assume, your leading Ideas belong. You must never forget that in

the realm of Ideas class distinctions are rigidly observed; there is an aristocracy and a proletariat, with all the intermediate grades; and many topics which may be safely mentioned among the commons are an offence when introduced to the nobility. 'The brain' is one of these. Its use, among the ghosts, is confined exclusively to the working class; and you will commit a breach of good manners by flaunting its functions in the presence of august society. Were you, for example, in the course of some conversation with a noble Principle, to offer him the use of your own brain, or to suggest that he was in need of such an implement, or in the habit of using it, you would commit an indiscretion of the first magnitude; and it is certain the offended spirit would strike you off his visiting list and decline to haunt you any more. Pardon my insistence on this point. Knowing, as I do, how apt you are to talk about your brain, I am naturally apprehensive lest, in an unguarded moment, you should thrust that organ under the nose of

some Great Idea. Believe me, it would be a fatal mistake. Remember, I implore you, what I have already said: that, in the spiritual world, the brain-habit is strictly confined to the working class."[1]

"Before you can persuade me of all this," I said, "you will have to turn my intelligence clean inside out."

"That is precisely what I intend doing, and the first step shall be taken this very instant. Begin the exercises by repeating the Formula of Initiation. It runs as follows:

'*Till another speaks to me I am nothing.*'"

"Why, Panhandle," I said laughing, "that is the very formula they taught me when I

[1] "Ni pour le jugement, ni pour le raisonnement, ni pour aucune autre faculté de la pensée proprement dite nous n'avons la moindre raison de supposer qu'elle soit attachée à tels ou tels processus cérébraux determinés. . . . Les phénomènes cérébraux sont en effet à la vie mentale ce que les gestes du chef d'orchestre sont à la symphonie: ils en dessinent les articulations motrices, ils ne font pas autre chose. On ne trouverait donc rien des opérations de l'esprit proprement dit à l'intérieur du cerveau." (Professor Henri Bergson: Presidential Address to the Society for Psychical Research, 1913.)

first entered a Public School. And they enforced it with kicks."

"The Universe enforces it in the same manner. But let us keep to the matter in hand. Repeat the formula at once."

"Wait," I said. "The situation is growing ominous, and I will not embark upon this enterprise till I know more of what it will lead to."

"Take your own time," said Panhandle. "The rules of my system forbid me to hurry the neophyte. If what I have told you already is not enough, you shall hear more. Among the ghosts who haunt this house are beings far mightier than any I have so far described. For a long time their identification baffled me, until one night I overheard them in high debate, and found they were occupied in an attempt to account for their own existence in the scheme of things. Then I knew who they were."

"These," I said, catching him up, "must assuredly be the ghosts of the great philosophies, or systems of thought, which in their

earthly state accounted for the existence of everything else, but left the problem of their own existence untouched."

"A most happy anticipation, and one that augurs well for your future success as an entertainer of ghosts. Have we not heard on high authority that no philosophy is complete until it has explained its own presence in the universe? Having neglected this at the first stage of their existence, the systems exercise their wits at the second in attempts to make good the oversight."

"Do many of them succeed?" I asked.

"Most of them fail; and for that reason their ghosts linger for ages in the neighbourhood of houses which, like my own, are hospitable to their presence. For it is a rule of the realm to which they now belong that so soon as any system succeeds in explaining its own origin it vanishes and passes on to a still higher state of existence."

"Panhandle," I said, "you have identified these ghosts beyond the possibility of cavil. A more conclusive proof could not be given."

"Beware, then, how you proceed!" said he. "It is possible that you will be haunted to-night not only by your Ideas in their severalty, but by your whole system of thought organised as one Synthetic Ghost. It will certainly question you on the subject of its creator, that being, as I have said, the central and absorbing interest of all these spirits. But again let me implore you to be on your guard against claiming to be its author. To inform such a ghost that it originates in a human intelligence, and that intelligence your own, would be treated as an outbreak of impudence deserving the highest resentment, and it is more than likely that the indignant phantom would put a lasting blight on your intellect or punish your presumption in ways yet more fearful to contemplate."

The flow of Panhandle's speech had now become extremely rapid, and my intelligence was beginning to lag in the rear. "Give me a breathing-space," I cried; "I need an interval for silent meditation." Then, in a voice so low that he could not hear me, I repeated to

myself the Formula of Initiation and, after musing for a few minutes, begged him to proceed. "A light is breaking," I said, "and your warnings are taking hold."

"In this connection," he resumed, "I could relate many things that would surprise you. Just as the personalities created by genius are apt to repudiate their creators, so the great philosophies when translated to the higher state are apt to disown all connection with the persons to whom their origin is humanly attributed. The philosophy of Spencer, for example, believes its author to be absolutely inscrutable; that of von Hartmann suspects a Professor, but declares him to have been unconscious of what he was doing. Pessimism, again, ascribes its beginning to a desire on the part of the Primal Power to give away the secret of its conspiracies against its own subjects; the doctrine that mind is mechanism believes itself the outcome of a non-mechanical principle, and has become in consequence the most superstitious of all the ghosts; and a group of materialistic

systems have concluded, after long debate, that all philosophies originate from Ink and a Tendency in the Ink to get itself transferred to Paper."

"It is evident," I interposed, "that even in their higher existence the systems are by no means free from illusions."

"Be cautious how you judge them," said Panhandle, "for it may be that in accounting for their origin they are less astray than yourself. None the less, you are right in declaring them defective. *Fallacies* perpetrated in a system at the first stage of its existence become *diseases* when translated to the second, and some of the ghosts in consequence live the life of invalids. The ghost of Evolution, for example, will appear before you in a deplorable condition. This ghost has recently learnt that it is suffering from an Undistributed Middle, a disease unamenable to treatment, being proof even against the Method of Eloquence, which as you know is a potent specific for most logical defects. You may easily identify the spirit by remembering

what I have told you. If you encounter an apparition walking about with hands pressed hard on its Middle, and groaning heavily, know that the spectre of Evolution is before you."

"Panhandle," I said, "your revelations have awakened my uttermost curiosity, and every nerve in my body is tense with eagerness to encounter an apparition. Heaven grant that the ghost of my own philosophy may appear! And yet, in a sense, I am disappointed. You promised that you would furnish me with material for my next book. But the public has no interest in the phantoms you have described, and will not believe in their existence."

"That remains to be seen," he answered. "Meanwhile, I give you my solemn pledge that you shall see a ghost before the night is out."

He said this in a tone so ominous that I could not refrain from starting. What could he mean? A sudden thought flashed upon me, and I cried aloud:

"My dear friend, you fill me with alarm, and I am on the point of giving way! I begin to suspect that I shall never see the ghosts until I have passed to another world. I believe that I am doomed to die in this house to-night! It was indicated in the tone of your voice."

With a quick motion Panhandle swung round in his chair and looked me full in the face.

"How do you know," he said, "that you are not dead now, and already passed to the existence of which you speak?"

The effort to answer his question revived my courage. But in all my life I have never found a problem half so difficult. To prove that I was not dead already and become a ghost! Forty or fifty times did I lay down a new set of premises, only to be reminded by Panhandle that I begged the question in every one. My ingenuity was taxed to breaking point, my voice was exhausted, the sweat was pouring from my brows, when, once again, from the upper airs where the sky-sign was

swinging, I heard the same fluttering and rustling which had arrested my attention at a former crisis. It was growing dark, and the arc-lamps which outlined the letters were all aglow. I watched the transformation, and suddenly saw, flashed out for a moment into the gathering darkness, these words:

"*Give it up.*"

III

PANHANDLE'S REMARKABLE ADVENTURE. THE GHOST APPEARS

DINNER was now served. We dined alone, and, in the intervals when the footman was out of the room, I seized the opportunity to probe further into the mystery of the haunted house.

"The ghosts," I said, "have not appeared. Neither in my own apartment, nor in the corridors, nor in the various empty rooms which I have visited, have I seen or heard anything to suggest that the house is haunted."

"May I ask," said my companion, "for the grounds of your statement that so far the ghost has failed to appear?"

"Save for yourself," I answered, "the only person I have seen since entering is the footman."

"And how do you know that the footman is not a ghost?"

"Why," said I, "he carried my bag upstairs, and pocketed the balance of half a crown I gave him to pay for a telegram."

"I never heard a feebler argument," he replied. "It is obvious that you resemble the majority of mankind, who, if they were to see a thousand ghosts every day, would never recognise one of them for what it was. Now, as to the footman——"

But at that moment the individual in question entered the room bringing coffee and cigars. When he had gone Panhandle resumed:

"We were speaking of the footman. But perhaps it would be wiser to deal with the matter in general terms. I have already said enough to satisfy any reasonable judge of evidence that this is a genuinely haunted house. I have now to add that a doubt may be raised as to *who is the haunter and who the haunted.*"

I sat silent, staring at Panhandle with wide

eyes of astonishment, for I had no universe of discourse to which I could relate the strange things I was hearing. He went on:

"From what I have told you already you have no doubt drawn the inference that the ghosts are haunting *me*. But the ghosts themselves are not of that mind. In their opinion it is I who am haunting *them*. My first discovery of this, which is destined to revolutionise the whole theory of ghosts, was made under circumstances which I will now relate.

"Many years ago I was seated in the library late one night engaged in writing a report of certain mysterious phenomena which had been observed in this house. I had just completed a copy of the signed evidence of the cook, the gardener, and the housemaid, all of whom had left that day without notice in consequence of something they alleged they had seen. Suddenly I thought I heard a whispered voice from the further side of the room, and looking up I saw seated at a table

two beings of human semblance, who were gazing intently in my direction.

"'Do you not see something on yonder chair?' asked one.

"'Yes,' answered the other, 'I certainly see something. Probably a gleam of light. Observe, the curtains are not quite closed, and this is about the time when they turn on the searchlight at the barracks. Draw the curtains close and it will instantly disappear.'

"The speaker went to the window, leaving the other still staring fearfully in my direction. Having closed the curtains, the man returned to his place.

"'By heaven!' he cried, 'the thing is still there!' And I could see the pallor creeping over his face.

"A moment later I heard one of them say, 'It has gone. Well, whatever it was, I have had a shock. I am trembling all over.' And with that he rang the bell.

"Presently a footman appeared with a bottle of spirits and a siphon. Having deposited

the tray, he chanced to look towards the place where I was sitting. A piercing cry followed, and the man ran screaming out of the room. The two men also started to their feet and began shouting something I could not hear. I suppose they were calling to some person in the house, for the shouts were quickly followed by the entry of a young fellow of athletic build and truculent countenance.

"'Show me your damned ghost,' he said, 'and I'll soon settle him.'

"'He's over there—in that seat,' cried one. 'For heaven's sake, go up to him, Reginald, and see what he's made of.'

"The truculent youth darted forward, but suddenly came to a dead stop, with a face as white as a sheet. Then with a trembling hand he whipped a revolver out of his pocket, and at five paces fired all six barrels point-blank at my body. At each shot I was aware of a painful feeling in the penumbra of my consciousness, like the sudden awakening of a buried sorrow."

At this point Panhandle paused to relight

his cigar, and I took the opportunity to make a remark.

"Count it no grievance," I said, "if one who shoots at psychologists is himself occasionally shot at. I surmise that the truculent youth was the ghost of a promising psychologist, foully murdered by your nefarious gun."

"Name it a righteous execution, and I shall agree," he answered.

"Or it may be," I added, "that many of the sudden and inexplicable pains that break out in our minds and in our bodies are caused by ghosts, or whatever you call them, shooting at us, or stabbing us, to test our reality."

Panhandle turned a keen glance at my face to see if I was serious, and, being satisfied that I was, continued:

"I have heard more unlikely explanations of such pains, and your theory is precisely one of those which medical science will have to investigate when these discoveries of mine are made public. But let me resume the narrative.

"At the sound of the firing the whole

household seemed to be aroused. And what a household it was! In a few moments the room was crowded with beings of reverend countenance and stately carriage. Looking round with slow, grave eyes, they conversed in whispers. 'Science must investigate this,' one of them said. 'We will arrange that a committee of the Society shall make a thorough examination of the house and test the phenomena. Don't forget to engage two shorthand writers and an expert in spirit photography. And let the room be sealed up till the experts arrive.'

"During the whole of these proceedings I remained absolutely still, my acquaintance with the other world having taught me the wisdom of reticence. At this point, however, I resolved to attempt communication with my visitors, and, looking round for a person to whom I might address myself, I observed a bright little fellow of twelve years old staring about him in an absent-minded way, quite inattentive to all that was going on. As I walked over to where he was standing he saw

me plainly, and showed not the least surprise on being addressed.

"'What is your name, my little man?' I asked.

"'Billy Burst,' said he.

"'And what are you thinking about while all those people are making such a fuss?'

"'*I am wondering how people weigh the planets*,' he answered.

"'Come along with me,' said I, 'and I will show you just what you want to know.'

"Then taking him by the hand I led him across the room to the seat I had just left; but though the sages who were present saw him cross the room, not one of them saw me, who was leading him by the hand.

"I took out a sheet of paper and began to draw figures and work formulæ, the boy meanwhile standing by the side of my chair and saying not a word. When I had finished I said:

"'Do you understand?'

"'Perfectly,' he answered; 'I see it at last. Thank you ever so much.'

"'Now Billy,' I said, 'there is something you can do for *me*. I want you to stand on that chair and tell the people that the person they are making the fuss about is named Panhandle, that you know him, that he is real and quite harmless, and that he hopes they won't shoot at him any more, because it hurts. Say you are *quite certain* he is real, because he has just told you how the planets are weighed.'

"'Dear Pan,' said Billy, 'don't ask me to do that. I never tell people about *you*; they would only laugh at me if I did. Let us keep just as we are, old fellow, and not tell our secret to anybody.'

"Unprepared for a style of address so familiar, 'Why, Billy,' I said, 'I have never seen you before.'

"'Are you quite sure you see me *now*?' he replied.

"Our positions had become reversed—Billy sitting in my study chair that he might read over what I had written about the planets, I standing by his side. I looked down to answer his last question, and for the briefest

fraction of a second a vision passed before me. The object beneath me was not my study chair, but a small iron bedstead on which there lay a boy, fast asleep. It passed in the twinkling of an eye, and I found myself seated as before at my desk; the half-finished report was before me, and, save myself, not a soul was in the room. 'It is certain,' thought I, 'that I am haunting somebody. In the name of all the secret Powers that guide the fates of men—whom am I haunting?"

"A marvellous story," I cried; "and more significant than even you, Panhandle, are aware. I knew Billy Burst. He and I were schoolmates, and practised magic together under the guidance of a mysterious Power whose name Billy would never disclose."

"You knew Billy Burst!" exclaimed Panhandle. "My friend, you fill me with astonishment and delight. Did I not say we were on the eve of great discoveries? Tell me all you know about Billy, for the matter is of the utmost importance."

"You are making *me* wait for the appearance of the ghost," said I, "and must not be aggrieved if I make *you* wait for information about Billy."

"I again pledge my word to you," he answered, "that you shall see a ghost this very night."

"And I pledge mine to you that you shall hear all about Billy as soon as the ghost appears. But it is my turn first."

"Let us make it a covenant," he said.

"Agreed!" I answered.

"Then shake hands over the bargain."

As he said this he stood up and extended his hand.

With the utmost eagerness I sprang to my feet and made the reciprocating gesture. For an instant I thought that excitement had unsteadied me, for my hand, seeking his, seemed to move at random in the vacant air. Then I made a second attempt, carefully noting the position of his extended palm, and this time the truth dawned upon me in a flash. My hand, indeed, grasped what seemed to be his.

But there was no substance to resist my closing fingers, no hardness of interior bones, no softness of enveloping tissues, no pressure, no contact, no warmth.

"Panhandle," I cried, "you are a ghost!"

"Hush!" he answered; "we never use that term in addressing one another. Whatever I *am*, you are also in process of *becoming*. You have been slow in making the discovery. I thought you had found me out when we stood among the cypress in the garden."

I was trembling all over and had no control over the next words that came to my tongue. What they were I cannot remember, but Panhandle's reply seems to indicate that I had been imploring him to tell me what kind of a ghost he was.

"Certainly not a character taken out of a novel," he was saying. "Think of the other orders of spirits who I told you were haunting the house, and place me in the last and highest."

"You are the ghost of a philosophy!" I said.

"I am."

"Whose philosophy are you?" I shouted, for the figure of Panhandle was rapidly sliding away into the distance.

"Your own!" was the answer.

"Come back, beloved Panhandle!" I called after the retreating figure. "Come back and let me fulfil my part of the compact before you go. I have yet to tell you the story of Billy Burst."

"I shall read it in the next chapter of your book," was the reply, now almost inaudible, so great was the distance from which it came.

I called yet louder, "I have a ghost-story to tell *you*, dear Panhandle. Very important. About the ghost of a novelist. Far better than yours about the novelist's characters!"

"I shall read about that in the next chapter but one."

Such, I am fain to believe, was the answer. But the voice had now become so faint that this rendering of the words is given with reserve. My first impression was that Panhandle said simply, "Pooh, pooh!"

I was determined not to let him go. Raising my voice to the uttermost, I continued to call him. "Come back," I kept shouting, "and arm me with one more word of wisdom for the battle of life! Without you, Panhandle, I have no protector, and the psychologists will surely devour me."

At the sound of the word "psychologists" Panhandle's flight was suddenly arrested. In one swoop he retraversed the vast space that now lay between us, and returned to his original position.

"Hear, then, my last word," he said. "The chief errors of mankind issue from the notion that thinking is a solitary process and the thinker an isolated being. In writing their works or monologues the thinkers, with few exceptions, have mistaken the form which is proper to philosophy and thereby done violence to the true nature of thought. All thinking is the work of a community; its form is conversational and, in the highest stages, dramatic. For want of this knowledge many philosophers have gone astray. Ignorant of

the other minds with which their own are in communion, deaf to the voices which mingle with theirs in the eternal dialogue of thought, they have uttered their message as a weary monologue, and the vivid interplay of mind with mind, the quick debate of reacting spirits, which is the very life of thought, has fallen dead. In the course of your education, which has properly begun to-day, you will become acquainted with a multitude of interlocutors whose existence you have never suspected, though they have been addressing you from the first moment you began to think and contributing much of what you consider most original in your thought. These are the ghosts by whom you will henceforth be haunted, until, finally, they make you one of themselves and carry you to heaven in a whirlwind of fire. Farewell."

Having said this, he instantly vanished, leaving behind him a faint odour of Havana cigars.

At the same moment a marvellous change, the stages of which have left no record on my

memory, passed over me. I found myself in the place where I am at this moment, this identical sheet of paper was under my hand, this pen was writing, and the ink of the last paragraph was still wet.

THE MAGIC FORMULA

I

MANY years ago I had a schoolfellow and bosom friend whom I knew as Billy, but whose name as it stood in the Register was William Xavier Plosive. Where his family came from, or where they got their outlandish name, I know not. From its rarity I infer that the Plosive stock has not multiplied lavishly on the earth. Only twice, since the days of my friendship with Billy, have I encountered that name. There is, or was, a wayside public-house in Devonshire, the landlord of which was a Plosive; it bore the sign of the "Dog and Ladle," which the signboard interpreted by a picture of a large retriever in precipitate flight with a tin ladle tied to his tail. The other Plosive of my

acquaintance kept a shop in a Canadian city; he was a French half-breed, and, as I have heard, a great rascal.

Billy's father was said to have been a Roman Catholic; and I infer from the name he bestowed on his son that he had a turn for waggishness of a sort. Plosive senior must have foreseen what would happen. No sooner, of course, was the name William X. Plosive seen on the outside of the poor boy's copy-books than a whisper passed through the whole school—"Billy Burst." And that name remained with him to the end. It was more appropriate than its bestowers knew.

"*When* did Billy burst?" "*Why* did Billy burst?" "Will Billy burst again?" and a hundred questions of the like order were asked all day long apropos of nothing. They were shouted in the playground. They were whispered in the class. They broke the silence of the dormitory in the dead of night. With them we relieved our pent-up feelings in hours of tedium or of gloom. Introduced *pianissimo*, they profaned the daily half-hour

devoted to the study of Divinity. Innumerable impositions followed in their train. One morning the Rev. Cyril Puttock, M.A., who "took" us in Divinity, saw written large on the blackboard in front of him these words: "What burst Billy?" I spent my next half-holiday in writing out the Beatitudes a hundred times.

Billy and I slept in the same dormitory and our beds were side by side. Both of us were bad sleepers, and many a deep affinity did our souls discover in the silent watches of the night. As a place to observe the workings of telepathy I know of no spot on earth to compare with the dormitory of a boarding-school. The atmosphere of our dormitory was, if I may say so, in a state of chronic telepathic saturation, and the area where the currents ran strongest was in the space between Billy's bed and mine. This is the sort of thing that would go on:

"Billy, are you awake?"

"Yes; I knew *you* were."

"Shall we talk?"

"I want to, ever so."

"I say, we are going to have that beastly pudding for dinner to-morrow."

"That's just what I want to talk about."

"I've got an idea. Billy, I found out yesterday where they cook those puddings. They boil them in the copper of the out-house, and the cook leaves them there while she looks after the rest of the dinner."

"Ripping!" answered Billy. "*I'll* tell you what we'll do.—Hush! Is old Ginger awake? —All right. Well, we'll sneak into the out-house to-morrow when the cook isn't looking, pinch the puddings out of the copper and chuck 'em in the pond."

"Why, Billy, that's just what I was going to say to you. But won't we scald our-selves?"

"I've thought of that. We'll get the garden fork and jab it into the puddings. They boil 'em in bags, you know."

"There's a better way than that. We'll get in before the copper has begun to boil."

"I hadn't thought of that, *but I was just*

going to," said Billy. "Yes, that's the way."

Enterprises such as these, however, were episodic, and merely serve to show how great souls, born under the same star, and united in the grand trend of their life-directions, share also the minor details of their activity. The seat of our affinities lay deeper. Both Billy and I were persons with an "end" in life, and breathed in common the atmosphere of great designs. We were like two young trees planted side by side on a breezy hill-top. Our roots were in the same soil; our branches swayed to the same rhythm; we heard the same secrets from the whispering winds. We were always on the heights. Few were the days of our companionship when we were not infatuated about something or other; and I sometimes doubt whether even yet I have outgrown the habit, so deep was its spring in my own nature and so strong the reinforcement it received from the influence of Billy. Sometimes we were infatuated about the same thing; and sometimes each of

us struck out an independent line of his own; but always we were the victims of one mania or another.

At the time this history begins the particular mania that afflicted me was the collecting of tramcar tickets. My friends used to save them for me; I begged them from passengers as they alighted from the cars; I picked them up in the street; and I had over seven thousand collected in a box. I thought that when the sum had risen to ten thousand the goal of my existence would be reached; and it may be said that I lived for little else.

Billy's mania was astronomy. He would spend the hours of his playtime lying on his stomach with a map of the stars spread out before him on the floor. Billy was a great astronomer—in secret. On the very day when he and I were being initiated into the mysteries of Decimals, he whispered to me in class, "I say, I wonder how people found out the weight of the planets." He was an absent-minded boy, and many a clout on the head

did he receive at this time for paying no attention to what was going on in class. Little did the master know what Billy was thinking of as he stared at the wall before him with his great, dreamy eyes—and not for ten thousand worlds would Billy have told him. He was thinking about the weight of the planets, and the problem lay heavy on his soul; and Billy grew ever more absent-minded, and spent more time on his stomach every day. At last he suddenly waked up and began to get top-marks not only in Arithmetic but in every other subject as well. And later on, when we came to the Quadratic Equations and the Higher Geometry, the master was amazed to find that Billy required no teaching at all.

"What has happened to Billy?" asked somebody; and the answer came, "Why, of course, Billy has *burst*."

So he had. Billy had found out "how they weighed the planets," and the mass of darkness that oppressed him had been blown away in the explosion. About the same time I burst

also. On counting up my tickets I found there were ten thousand of them.

Then came a pause, during which Billy and I wandered about in dry places seeking rest and finding none. Life lost its spring and the world seemed very flat, stale, and unprofitable. Conversation flagged, or became provocative of irritable rejoinders. "I say, what are you going to do with all those tramcar tickets?" asked Billy one day. "Oh, shut up!" I replied. Shortly afterwards it was my turn. "Billy, tell me what they mean by 'sidereal time.'" "Oh, shut up!" said he.

We were both waiting for the new birth, or the new explosion, utterly unconscious of our condition. But the Powers-that-be were maturing their preparations, and, all being complete, they put the match to the train in the following manner.

The usual exchange of measles and whooping-cough had been going on in our school, and Billy and I being convalescent from the latter complaint, to which we had both succumbed at the same time, were sent out one day to

take an airing in the Park. On passing down a certain walk, shaded by planes, we noticed a very old gentleman seated in a bath-chair which had been wheeled under the shadow of one of the trees. He sat in the chair with his head bent forward on his chest, and his wasted hands were spread out on the cover. He seemed an image of decrepitude, a symbol of approaching death. He was absolutely still. A young woman on the bench beside him was reading aloud from a book.

I think it was the immobility of the old man that first arrested our attention. The moment we saw him we stopped dead in our walk and stood, motionless as the figure before us, staring at what we saw. We just stared without thinking, but even at this long distance I can remember a vague emotion that stirred me, as though I had suddenly heard the wings of time beating over my innocent head, or as though a faint scent of death had arisen in the air around; such, I suppose, as horses or dogs may feel when they pass over the spot where a man has been slain.

Suddenly Billy Burst clutched my arm—he had a habit of doing that.

"I say," he whispered, "let's go up to him and *ask him to tell us the time.*"

We crept up to the bath-chair like two timid animals, literally sniffing the air as we went. Neither the old man nor his companion had noticed us, and it was not until we had both stopped in front of them that the reader looked up from her book. The old man was still unaware of our presence.

"If you please," said Billy, "would you mind telling us the time?"

At the sound of Billy's voice the old man seemed to wake from his dream. He lifted his head and listened, as though he heard himself summoned from a far point in space; and his eyes wandered vaguely from side to side unable to focus the speaker. Then they fell on Billy and his gaze was arrested.

Now Billy was a beautiful person—*the very image of his mater.* The eyes of the houri were his, the lids slightly elevated at the outer angle; he had the mouth of them that

are born to speak good things; and about his brow there played a light which made you dream of high Olympus and of ancestors who had lived with the gods. Yes, there was a star on Billy's forehead; and this star it was that arrested the gaze of the old man.

A look of indescribable pleasure overspread the withered face. It almost seemed as if, for a moment, youth returned to him, or as if a breath of spring had awakened in the midst of the winter's frost.

"The time, laddie?" said he, "Why, yes, of course I can give you the time; as much of it as you want. For, don't you see, I'm a very old fellow—ninety-one last birthday; which I should think is not more than eighty years older than you, my little man. So I've plenty of time to spare. But don't take too much of it, my laddie. It's not good for little chaps like you. Now, *how much* of the time would you like?"

"The *correct* time, if you please, sir," said Billy, ignoring the quantitative form in which the question had been framed.

So the old gentleman gave us the correct time. When we had passed on, I looked back and saw that he was talking eagerly to his companion and pointing at Billy.

"I'll tell you what," said Billy as soon as we were out of hearing. "I've found out something. *It does old gentlemen good to ask them the time.* Let's ask some more."

So for an hour or more we wandered about looking out for old gentlemen—"to do them good." Several whom we met were rejected by Billy on the ground that they were not old enough, and allowed to pass unquestioned. Some three or four came up to the standard, and at each experiment we found that our magic formula worked with wonderful success. It provoked smiles and kind words; it pleased the old gentlemen; it did them good. Old hands were laid on young shoulders; old faces lit up; old watches were pulled out of old pockets. One was a marvel with a long inscription on the gold back of it. And the old gentleman showed us the inscription, which stated that the watch had been pre-

sented to him by his supporters for his services to political progress and for the gallant way in which he had fought the election at So-and-so in 1867. Yes, it did the old gentlemen good. But, be it observed, Billy was the spokesman every time.

From that time onward, Billy and I were Masters in Magic, no less, infatuated with our calling and devoted to our formula. The star-books were bundled into Billy's play-box; the ten thousand tramcar tickets were thrown into the fire.

Never since the world began, thought we, had a more glorious game been invented, never had so important an enterprise been conceived by the wit of man and entrusted to two apostles twelve years old. A world-wide mission to old gentlemen was ours. Who would have believed there were so many of them? They seemed to spring into existence, to gather themselves from the four quarters of the earth, in order that they might receive the healing touch of our formula. We met them in the street, in the Park, by the river, at the

railway station, coming out of church—everywhere. And all were completely in our power. Oh, it was magnificent!

So it went on for three or four weeks. But a shock was in store for us.

At first, as I have said, Billy was the spokesman. But there came a day when it seemed good that some independence of action should be introduced into the partnership. Billy went one way and I another.

Going on alone, I presently espied an old gentleman, of promising antiquity, walking briskly down one of the gravel paths. He was intermittently reading a newspaper. Trotting up behind him, I observed that in the intervals of his reading he would be talking to himself. He would read for half a minute and then, whipping the newspaper behind his back, begin to declaim, as though he were making a speech, quickening his pace meanwhile, so that I was hard put to it to keep up with him. Indeed I had to run, and was out of breath when, coming up alongside, I popped

out my question, "If you please, sir, what o'clock is it?"

"Go to the devil!" growled the old ruffian. And without pausing even to look at me he strode on, continuing his declamation, of which I happen to remember very distinctly these words: "I cannot, my Lords, I will not, join in congratulating the government on the disgrace into which they have brought the country." I recall these words because they resembled something in a speech of Chatham's which I had to learn by heart at school, and I remember wondering whether the old gentleman was trying to learn the same speech and getting it wrong, or whether he was making up something of his own.

Be that as it may, I had received a blow and my fondest illusion was shattered. I was personally insulted. As a professional magician I was flouted, and my calling dishonoured. And, worst of all, the magic had broken down. For the first time the formula had failed to work—had done the old gentleman *no good*. It cut me to the heart.

I ran about in great distress, seeking Billy, whom finding presently I informed in general terms of what had happened.

"What did you say to the old beast?" asked Billy.

"I said, 'If you please, sir, what o'clock is it?'"

"Oh, you ass!" cried Billy. "*Those are the wrong words.* If you'd said, 'Would you mind telling me the time?' he'd have gone down like a ninepin. Only cads say 'what o'clock.' He thought you were a cad! Oh, you idiot! Leave me to do it next time."

Thus it came to pass that the partnership was resumed on its old basis, with Billy as the predominant member and spokesman of the Firm.

And now we entered on what I still regard as an enterprise of pith and moment. We determined, after long colloquy in the bedroom, to waylay this recalcitrant old gentleman once more, and repeat our question in its proper form, and with Billy as spokesman. Had I been alone, my courage would certainly

have failed to carry me through. But with Billy at my side I was never afraid of anything either then or afterwards. O Billy, if only you had been with me—then—and then —if only I had felt your presence when the great waters went over me, if only I could have seen your tilted dreaming eyes when— I would have made a better thing of it, indeed I would! But one was taken and the other left; and I had to fight those battles alone—alone, but not forgetful of you. I did not fight them very well, Billy; and yet not so ill as I should have done had I never known you.

Well, for several days the declaiming gentleman, whom we now knew as "the old beast," and never called by any other name, failed to appear. But at last we caught sight of him, striding along and violently whipping his newspaper behind his back, just as before.

On the former occasion, when I was alone, I had operated from the rear, but with Billy in support, I proposed that we should attack from the front. So we threw ourselves in his

path and marched steadily to meet him. On he came, and as he drew near, down went the newspaper, and, as though he were spitting poison, he hissed out from between his teeth a fearful sentence, of which the last words were: "the most iniquitous government that has ever betrayed and abused the confidence of a sovereign people"—staring meanwhile straight over our heads.

"If you please, sir," said Billy in his singing voice, "would you mind telling us the time?"

"Go to——" But at that moment the gentleman lowered his fierce old eyes and encountered the gaze of Billy, who was standing full in his path.

Have you ever seen a wild beast suddenly grow tame? I have not, but I saw something like it on the occasion of which I speak. Never did a swifter or more astonishing change pass over the countenance of any human being. I really think the old fellow suffered a physical shock, for he stepped back two paces and looked for a moment like one who has been seriously hurt. Then he recovered himself;

lowered his spectacles to the tip of his nose; gazed over them, at me for a moment, at Billy for a quarter of a minute, and finally broke out into a hearty laugh.

"Well," he exclaimed, in the merriest of voices, "you're a couple of young rascals. What are your names, and how old are you, and what school do you belong to, and who are your fathers?"

We answered his questions in a fairly business-like manner until we came to that about the fathers. Here there was an interlude. For Billy had to explain, in succession, that he had no father, and no mother, and no brothers, and no sisters—indeed, no relations at all that he knew of. And there was some emotion at this point.

"Bless my soul," said the old gentleman, "that's very sad—very sad indeed. But who pays for your schooling?"

"A friend of my mater's," said Billy. "He's very good to me and has me to his house for the holidays."

"And gives you plenty of pocket-money?"

"Lots," answered Billy.

The old gentleman ruminated, and there was more emotion.

"Then you are not an unhappy boy?" he said at length.

"Not a bit," answered Billy.

"Thank God for that! Thank God for that! I should be very sorry to learn you were unhappy. I hope you never will be. You don't *look* unhappy."

"I'm not," repeated Billy.

All this time the old gentleman seemed quite unconscious of my existence. But I was not hurt by that. I was well used to being overlooked when Billy was with me, and never questioned for a moment the justice of the arrangement. But now the old gentleman seemed to recollect himself.

"What was it you asked me just now?" said he.

"We asked if you would mind telling us the time."

"Ha, just so. Now are you quite sure that what you asked for is what you want?

You said '*the* time' not 'time.' For you must know, my dears, that there's a great difference between 'time' and '*the* time.'"

Billy and I looked at each other, perplexed and disgusted—perplexed by the subtle distinction just drawn by the old gentleman; disgusted at being addressed as "my dears." ("He might as well have given us a kiss while he was about it," we thought.)

"We want *the* time, if you please," we said at length.

"What, *the whole of it*?" said the old gentleman.

"No," answered Billy, "we only want the bit of it that's going on now."

"Which bit is that?" said our venerable friend.

"That's just what we want to know," answered Billy.

This fairly floored the old gentleman. "You'll be a great Parliamentary debater one day, my boy," he said, "but the bit of time that's going on now is not an easy thing to catch. My watch can't catch it."

"Give us the best your watch can do," answered Billy.

This made the old fellow laugh again. "Better and better," said he. "Well, the best my watch can do is a quarter past twelve. And that reminds me that you two young scamps have made me late for an appointment. Now be good boys, both of you; and don't forget to write every week to your moth—to your friends. And put that in your pockets." Whereupon he gave each of us half-a-sovereign.

We walked on in silence, not pondering what had happened, for we pondered nothing in those days, but serenely conscious of triumph. A potent secret was in our hands and the world was at our feet.

"It worked," said Billy at length.

"Rather!" I answered.

"It did him good."

"Rather!"

"We beat him."

"Rather!"

Presently we were greeted by the Park-keeper, who was a friend of ours.

"Well, young hopefuls," he said, "and who have you been asking the time of to-day?"

We pointed to the old gentleman whose figure was still visible in the distance.

"Him!" cried the Park-keeper. "Well, bless your rascal impudence! Do you know who *he* is?"

"No."

"Why, he's Lord ——."

The name mentioned was that of a distinguished member of the Cabinet which had recently gone out of office.

Did we quail and cower at the mention of that mighty name? Did we cover ourselves with confusion? Not we.

"I'm awfully glad we asked him," said Billy as we walked away.

"So am I—I say, Billy, I wish we could meet the Pope. He's jolly old, and I'll bet he's jolly miserable, too."

"You shut up about his being miserable," answered Billy, who, as we know, was a Roman Catholic. "He ain't half as miserable as the

Archbishop of Canterbury. I wish we could meet *him*!"

"Or the Emperor of Germany," I suggested.

"Yes, he'd do. I'd ask him, and you bet he'd tell us. But"—and here Billy's manner became explosive—"I'll tell you what! *I wish we could meet God!* He's a jolly sight older than the Pope, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Emperor of Germany. I believe he'd like to be asked more than any of them. And I'd ask him like a shot!"

"But *he's* not miserable," I interposed.

"How do you know he isn't—*sometimes*? It would do him good anyhow."

I was getting out of my depth. As a speculator I had none of the boldness which prompted the explosions of Billy, and an instinct of decency suggested a change of conversation.

"What shall we do with those half-sovereigns?" I asked.

"Hush!" said Billy, "*they'll* hear you."

"Who'll hear me?"

"Never mind who. They're listening, you bet. Never say 'half-sovereigns' again."

"But what are we to do with them?"

"Keep them. Let's put a cross on each of them at once."

So we took out the coins, and with our penknives we scratched a cross on the cheek of her gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria.

Both coins are now in my possession. The cross on the cheek of Queen Victoria has worked wonders. It has brought me good luck. In return I have hedged the coins with safeguards both moral and material. When I am gone they will be—— But I am anticipating.

And now the fever was in full possession of our souls. I believe we were secretly determined to bring all the old gentlemen in the world under the sway of our formula. We were beneficent magicians. Had we been older, a vast prospect of social regeneration would have opened before us. But all we knew at the time was that we possessed a power for rejuvenating the aged. An ardent missionary fervour burned in our bones; and

we were swept along as by a whirlwind. Never was infatuation more complete.

As a preliminary step to the accomplishment of these great designs we resolved to ask ten thousand old gentlemen to tell us the time. Making a calculation, we reckoned that, at the normal rate of progress, nine years would be required to complete the task. We were a little disconcerted, and, in order to expedite matters, we resolved to include old ladies, and any young persons of either sex with grey hair, or who, in our opinion, showed other signs of prematurely growing old. This led on to further extensions. We agreed, first, that anyone who looked "miserable" should have the benefit of our formula; next, that all limitations whatsoever, save one, should be withdrawn, and the formula allowed a universal application. The outstanding limitation was that nobody should be asked the question until he had been previously viewed by Billy, who was a psychologist, and pronounced by him to be "the right sort." What constituted the "right sort" we never

succeeded in defining; enough that Billy knew the "right sort" when he saw it and never made a mistake. We believed that all mankind were divided into two classes, the sheep and the goats; in other words, those who were worthy to be asked the time and those who were not, and Billy was the infallible judge for separating them the one from the other. To ask the question of any person was to seal that person's election and to put upon him the stamp of immortality.

I believed, and still believe, that many whom we accosted were instantly conscious of a change for the better in their general conditions. Years afterwards I met a man who remembered these things and bore testimony to the good we had done him. "It so happened," said he, "that just before I met you boys, that day, I had been speculating heavily on the Stock Exchange and had had a run of infernal bad luck. But the moment that little chap with the tilted eyes spoke to me I said to myself, 'The clouds are breaking.' And, by George, sir, my luck turned that very

day. I walked straight to the telegraph office and sent my broker a wire which netted me a matter of £7000."

As became a firm of businesslike magicians, Billy and I kept books, duly averaged and balanced, entering in them day by day the names of the persons to whom we had applied the formula. Are the names worthy of being recorded? Perhaps not. But a few specimens will do no harm and may incidentally serve to reveal the scope and catholicity of our operations. One of these books is before me now, and here are a few of the names, culled almost at random from its pages. It will be observed that in the last group our faculty of invention gave out and we were compelled to plagiarise.

Mr Smoky, Mr Shinytopper, Uncle Jellybones, Aunt Ginger, Lady Peppermint, Bishop Butter, Canon Sweaty, Dirty Boots, Holy Toad, Satan, Old Hurry, Old Bless-my-soul, Old Chronometer, Miss No-watch, Dr Beard, Lord Splutters, Aurora, Mrs Proud, Polly Sniggers, Diamond Pin, Cigar, Cuttyperoozle,

Jim, Alfred Dear! Mr Just-engaged, Miss Ditto, Mr Catch-his-train, Mr Hot, The Reverend Hum, The Reverend Ha-ha, So-there-you-be, Mrs Robin, Mr High-mind, Mr Love-lust, Mr Heady.

II

All of a sudden, and in the most unexpected manner, these vast designs of ours contracted their dimensions, or, as one might say, our outlook became focussed on a solitary point. From a world-wide mission to all mankind we narrowed down at a single stroke to a concentrated operation on a strictly limited class. But I can tell you that what our mission lost in scope it gained in intensity. You shall hear how all this happened and judge for yourself.

One night Billy and I were lying awake as usual, and the question "shall we talk?" had been asked and duly answered in the affirmative. We had raised ourselves in bed, leaning toward each other, and the telepathic current was running strong.

"Billy," I whispered, "I've got a ripping notion, a regular stunner. I'm bursting to tell you."

"What is it?"

"Put your ear a little closer, Billy, and listen like mad. Suppose you were to meet a beautiful woman—*what would you do?*"

Quick as thought came the answer—"I should ask her to tell me the time."

"Why, that's *exactly* what *I* should do. We'll do it, the very next time we meet one. And, Billy, I'm sure we shall meet one *soon*."

"So am I."

Next day, the instant we were freed from school we bolted for the Park, exalted in spirit and full of resolution. A lovely Presence floated in the light above us and accompanied us as we ran. Arrived in the Park, we seemed to have reached the threshold of a new world. We stood on a peak in Darien; and before us there shimmered an enchanted sea lit by the softest of lights and tinted with the fairest of colours. Forces as old as the earth and as young as the dawn were stirring within us;

the breath of spring was in our souls, and a vision of living beauty, seen only in the faintest of glimpses, lured us on.

Think not that we lacked discrimination. "Let's wait, Billy," I said, as he made a dart forward at a girl in a white frock, "till we find one beautiful *enough*. That one won't do. Look at the size of her feet."

"*Whackers*!" said he, checking himself. And then he made a remark which I have often thought was the strangest thing Billy ever uttered. "I wouldn't be surprised," came the solemn whisper, "*if her feet were made of clay.*"

So day by day we ranged the Park, sometimes together, sometimes separate, possessed of one thought only—that of a woman beautiful enough *to be asked the time.* Hundreds of faces—and forms—were examined, sometimes to the surprise of their owners; but the more we examined, the more inexorable, the more difficult to satisfy, became our ideal. At each fresh contact with reality it rose higher and outran the facts of life, until we were on the

point of concluding that the world contained no woman beautiful enough to be asked the time. Never were women stared at with greater innocence of heart, but never were they judged by a more fastidious taste. And yet we had no definable criterion. Of each new specimen examined all we could say was, "That one won't do." But *why* she wouldn't do we didn't know. We never disagreed. What wouldn't do for Billy wouldn't do for me, and *vice versa.*

Once we met a charming little girl about our own age, walking all alone. "That's the one!" cried I. "Come on, Billy."

I started forward, Billy close behind. Presently he clutched my jacket, "Stop!" he said, "*What if she has no watch?*"

The little girl was running away.

"We've frightened her," said Billy, who was a little gentleman. "We're two beasts."

"She heard what you said about the watch," I answered, "and thought we wanted to steal it. She had one after all. Billy, we've lost our chance."

As we went home that day, something gnawed cruelly at our hearts. Things had gone wrong. An ideal world had been on the point of realisation, and a freak of contingency had spoiled it. In another moment "time" would have been revealed to us by one worthy to make the revelation. But the sudden thought of a watch had ruined all. Once more we had tasted the tragic quality of life.

With ardour damped but not extinguished, we continued the quest day after day. But we were now half-hearted and we became aware of a strange falling-off in the beauty of the ladies who frequented the Park.

"We shall never find her here," said Billy. "Let's try the walk down by the river. They are better-looking down there, especially on Sunday afternoon. And I'll bet you most of them have watches."

The very day on which Billy made this proposal another nasty thing happened to us. We were summoned into the Headmaster's study and informed that complaints had reached him concerning two boys who were

in the habit of walking about in the Park and staring in the rudest manner at the young ladies, and making audible remarks about their personal appearance. Were we the culprits? We confessed that we were. What did we mean by it? We were silent: not for a whole Archipelago packed full of buried treasure would we have answered that question. Did we consider it conduct worthy of gentlemen? We said we did not, though as a matter of fact we did. Dark hints of flagitiousness were thrown out, which our innocence wholly failed to comprehend. The foolish man then gave himself away by telling us that whenever we met Miss Overbury's school on their daily promenade we were to walk on the other side of the road.

Billy and I exchanged meaning glances: we knew now who had complained (as though we would ever think of asking *them* to tell us the time!). Finally we were forbidden, under threat of corporal chastisement, to enter the Park under any pretexts or circumstances whatsoever.

"The old spouter doesn't know," said I to Billy as we left the room, "that we've already made up our minds not to go there again. What a 'suck-in' for him!"

Necessity having thus combined with choice, the scene of our quest was now definitely shifted to the river-bank, where a broad winding path, with seats at intervals, ran under the willows. Here a new order of beauty seemed to present itself, and our hopes ran high. Several promising candidates presented themselves at once. One, I remember, wore a scarlet feather; another carried a gray muff. The scarlet feather was my fancy; the gray muff Billy's.

I think it was on the occasion of our third visit to the river that the crisis came. We sat down on the bank and held a long consultation. "Well," said Billy at last, "I'm willing to ask Scarlet Feather. She's ripping. Her *nose* takes the cake; but, mind you, Gray Muff has the prettier *boots*. And I know Scarlet Feather has a watch—I saw the chain when we passed her just now. But before

deciding I'm going to have another look at Gray Muff. She's just round the bend. You wait here—I'll be back in half a second."

I was left alone, and for some minutes I continued to gaze at the flowing stream in front of me. Suddenly I saw, dancing about on the surface of the water—but doubtless the whole thing was hallucination! My nerves were in high tension at the moment, and in those days I could have dreams without going to sleep.

The dream was interrupted by the sudden return of Billy. He was white as the table-cloth and trembling all over.

"Come on!" he gasped. "I've found the very one! Quick, quick, or she'll be gone!"

"Is it Gray Muff?" I asked.

"No, no. It's another. The Very One, I tell you. The One we've been looking for."

"Billy," I said, "I've just seen a Good One too. She was dancing about on the water."

"Oh, rot!" cried Billy. "Mine's the One! Come on, I say! I'm certain she won't wait.

She looked as though she wouldn't sit still for a single minute."

"What is she like, Billy?" I asked as we hurried away.

"She's—*oh, she's the exact image of my mater!*" he said.

Billy's mater had died about a year ago. At the age of twelve I had been deeply in love with her, and to this hour her image remains with me as the type of all that is most lovely and commendable in woman. O Billy's mater, will these eyes ever see you again? How glad I am to remember you! I know where you lie buried, but I doubt if there lives another soul who could find your resting-place. Harshly were you judged and conveniently were you forgotten! But I will scatter lilies on your grave this very night.

Well, we ran with all our might. Scarlet Feather, Gray Muff, and the dancing "good one" on the surface of the water were clean forgotten as if they had never existed—as perhaps one of them never did. "*Just* like my mater!" Billy kept gasping. "Hurry up! I

tell you she won't wait! She's on the seat watching the water; no, not *that* seat. It's round the next bend but one."

We turned the bend and came in sight of the seat where Billy had seen what he saw. The seat was empty. We looked round us: not a soul was in sight. We checked our pace and in utter silence, and very slowly, crept up to the empty seat, gazing round us as we walked. Was there ever such a melancholy walk! Oh, what a *Via Dolorosa* we found it! Arrived at the seat, Billy felt it all over with his hands and, finding nothing, flung himself face downwards on the turf and uttered the most lamentable cry I have ever heard.

"I knew she wouldn't wait," he moaned. "Oh, why weren't we quicker! Oh, why didn't I ask her the time the minute I saw her!"

As, shattered and silent, we crawled back to school, continually loitering to gaze at a world that was all hateful, I realised with a feeling of awe that I had become privy to something deep in Billy's soul. And I inwardly resolved that, so far as I could, I would set the matter

right, and put friendship on a footing of true equality, by telling Billy the deepest secret of *mine*.

"Billy," I said, as we lay wakeful in the small hours of the next morning, "come and stay with us next holidays, *and I will show you something*."

"What is it?"

"You wait and see."

The great adventure was over. It had ended in disaster and tears. Never again did Billy and I ask any human being to tell us the time.

III

In those days I was a great metaphysician. Unassisted by any philosopher, ancient or modern, I had made a discovery in the metaphysical line. This discovery was *my* secret.

In the church-tower of the village where I was nurtured there was an ancient and curious clock, said to have been brought from Spain by a former owner of the parish. This clock was worked by an enormous pendulum which hung down, through a slit in the ceiling, into

the body of the church, swinging to and fro at the west end of the nave. Its motion was even and beautiful; and the sight of it fascinated me continually through the hours of divine service. To those who were not attentive, the pendulum was inaudible; but if you listened you could detect a gentle tick, tock, between the pauses of the hymns or the parson's voice. "Let us pray," said the parson. "Tick," whispered the pendulum. "We beseech Thee—" cried the clerk, (tick!); — "to hear us, good Lord" (tock!). The clerk had unconsciously fallen into the habit of timing his cadence in the responses to correspond with these whispers of the pendulum. For my part, I used to think that this correspondence was the most beautiful arrangement in the universe. I loved the even motion of the pendulum; but I loved the faithful whispers more. To this day I have only to shut my eyes on entering a village church, and sit still for half a minute, and sure enough, stealing through the silence, comes the "tick, tock" of that ancient pendulum.

Of all the religious instruction I received during the eight or nine years we attended that church I confess I have not the faintest recollection. I cannot remember whether the sermons were good or bad, long or short, high, low, or broad. I know they never wearied me, for I never listened to a word that was said. The pendulum saw to that. There were two parsons in our time. The first, I have heard, was a very good man, but by no effort of memory can I recall what he was like. The second I do remember, and could draw his face on this sheet of paper, were I to try. I respected and admired him, not, I am sorry to say, for the purity of his life or his faithfulness in preaching the Gospel, but because he had fought and licked our gardener, whom I detested, outside the village Pub. With a little concentration of mind I can reconstruct the scene in church during this parson's tenure of office. I can see the rascal eminent in his pulpit, plodding through his task. I can hear the thud of the hymn-book which my father used to toss into the clerk's pew when he

thought the sermon had lasted long enough: immediately the sermon stops and a great bull-voice roars out, "Now to God the Father," and so on. But all such incidents are as a fringe to the main theme of my memory —the restless curve of the swinging disc, and the whispered syllables of Time.

The question that haunted me was this: Did the pendulum *stop* on reaching the highest point of the ascending arc? Did it pause before beginning the descent? And if it stopped, did *time* stop with it? I answered both questions in the affirmative. Well, then, what was a *second*? Did the stoppage at the end of the swing make the second, or was the second made by the swing, the movement between the two points of rest? I concluded that it was the stoppage. For, mark you, it *takes* a second for the pendulum to reach the stopping point on either side; therefore there can be no second till that point is reached; the second must *wait* for the stoppage to do the business. I saw no other way of getting *any* seconds. And if no seconds, no minutes;

and if no minutes, no hours, no days, and therefore no time at all—which is absurd.

I found great peace in this conclusion; but none the less I continued to support it by collateral reasonings, and by observation. In particular I determined, for reasons of my own, to make a careful survey of the hands of the clock. With this object I borrowed my father's field-glass, and, retiring to a convenient point of observation, focussed it on the clock-face. Instantly a startling phenomenon sprang into view. I saw that the big hand of the clock, instead of moving evenly as it seemed to do when viewed by the naked eye, was visibly *jerking* on its way, in time with the seconds that were being ticked off by the pendulum inside. By George, the hand was going jerk, jerk! The pendulum and the hand were moving together! Jerk went the hand: then a pause. What's happening now? thought I. Why the pendulum has just ticked and is going to tock. Tock it goes and —there you are!—jerk goes the hand again. "Why, of course," I said to myself, "that

proves it. The hand *stops*, as well as the pendulum. The evidence of the hand corroborates the evidence of the pendulum. The seconds *must* be the stoppages. They can't be anything else. There's nothing else for them to be. I'll tell Billy Burst this very day! But no, I won't. I'll wait till the holidays and *show* it him."

Such was the secret which I resolved to impart to Billy in return for what he had disclosed to me.

Some months after this amazing discovery Billy came down for the holidays. He arrived late in the afternoon, and I could hardly restrain my impatience while he was having his tea. Hardly had he swallowed the last mouthful when I had him by the jacket. "Come on, Billy," I cried. "I'm going to show you something"—and we ran together to the church. Arrived there, I placed him in front of the pendulum, which seemed to be swinging that afternoon with an even friendlier motion than usual.

"There!" I said, "look at him."

Billy stood spell-bound. Oh, you should have seen his face! You should have seen his eyes slowly moving their lambent lights as they followed the rhythm of the pendulum from side to side. If Billy was hypnotised by the pendulum, I was hypnotised by Billy. Suddenly he clutched my arm in his wonted way.

"I say," he whispered, "*it knows us.* Here, old chap" (addressing the pendulum), "you know us, don't you? You're glad to see us, aren't you?"

"Tick, tock," said the pendulum.

"Can't he talk—just!" said Billy. "Look at his eye! He winked at me that time, I'll swear." And, by the Powers, the very next time the pendulum reached the top of the arc I saw the crumpled metal in the middle of the disc double itself up and wink at *me* also, plain as plain.

"Billy," I said, "if we stare at him much longer we shall both go cracked. Let's go into the churchyard. I've something else to show you."

So to the churchyard we went, and there, among the mouldering tombstones, I expounded to Billy my new theory as to the nature of Time, reserving the crowning evidence until Billy had grasped the main principle.

"So you see," I concluded, "the seconds are the stoppages."

"There aren't any stoppages," said he. "Pendulums don't stop."

"How can they go down after coming up unless they stop between?" I asked.

"Wait till you get to the Higher Mathematics."

"Then where do the seconds come in?"

"They don't *come* in: they *are* in all along."

"Then," I said triumphantly, "look at that clock face. Can't you see how the big hand goes jerk, jerk?"

"Well, what of that?"

"What of that? Why, if the seconds aren't the stoppages, what becomes of time between the jerks?"

"Why," answered Billy, "*it's plugging ahead all the time.*"

"All *what* time?" I countered, convinced now that I had him in a vicious circle.

"Blockhead!" cried Billy. "Don't you remember what that old Johnny told us in the Park? There's all the difference in the world between *the* time and *time.*"

"I'll bet you can't tell me what the difference is."

"Yes, I can. It's the difference between the pendulum and the clock-hand. Look at the jerking old idiot! *That* thing can't talk; *that* thing can't wink; *that* thing doesn't know us. Why, you silly, it only does what the pendulum tells it to do. The pendulum *knows* what it's doing. But *that* thing doesn't. Here, let's go back into the church and have another talk with the jolly old chap!"

Ten years later when Billy, barely twenty-three, had half finished a book which would have made him famous, I handed him an essay by a distinguished philosopher, and requested

him to read it. The title was "On translating Time into Eternity." When Billy returned it, I asked him how he had fared. "Oh," he answered, "I translated time into eternity without much difficulty. *But it was plugging ahead all the time.*"

Shortly after that, Billy rejoined his mater —a victim to the same disease. Poor Billy! You brought luck to others; God knows you had little yourself. He died in a hospital, without kith or kin to close his eyes. The Sister who attended him brought me a small purse which she said Billy had very urgently requested her to give me. On opening the purse I found in it a gold coin, marked with a cross. The nurse also told me that an hour before he died Billy sat up suddenly in his bed and, opening his eyes very wide, said in a singing voice:

"If you please, Sir, would you mind telling me the time?"

ALL MEN ARE GHOSTS

I

DR PIECRAFT BECOMES CONFUSED

"'To be or not to be—that is the *question*,' said Hamlet:
'To be is not to be—that is the *answer*,' said Hegel."

DR PHIPPENY PIECRAFT invented this couplet one night for his own edification, as, inert in body and despondent in mind, he lay back in the arm-chair of his consulting-room. "There is more point," he went on, "in Hamlet's 'question' than in Hegel's 'answer.' But the gospel is not in either. Both are futile as physic. At all events, neither of them brings any consolation to me."

Dr Piecraft was reflecting on the hardness of his lot. Ten years had elapsed since he first mounted his brass plate, and he was still virtually without a practice. He earned just

enough from casual patients to pay his rent and keep body and soul together. To be sure, his father had left him a hundred a year; but Piecraft had given the old man a promise "that he would look after Jim." Now Jim was a half-brother, many years younger than himself; and he was also the one being in the world whom Piecraft loved with an undivided heart. So the whole of his income from that source was ear-marked for the boy's education; not for worlds would the doctor have spent a penny of it on himself. He even denied himself cigars, of which he was exceedingly fond, restricting himself to the cheapest of tobacco, in order that Jim might have plenty of pocket-money; and whenever the question arose as to who was to have a new suit of clothes, Jim or the doctor, it was always Jim who went smart and the doctor who went shabby.

He was over forty years of age, and, in his own eyes, a failure. Yet no man could have done more to deserve success. His medical qualifications were of the widest and highest;

diplomas of all sorts covered the walls of his consulting-room; a gold medal for cerebral pathology lay in a glass case on his writing-table. He was actively abreast of advancing medical science; he had run into debt that he might keep himself supplied with the best literature of his profession, and he was prepared at a moment's notice to treat a difficult case in the light of the latest discoveries at Paris, St Petersburg, or New York. Moreover, he had led a clean life, and was known among his friends as a man of irreproachable honour. But somehow the patients seemed to avoid him, and only once in two years had he been summoned to a consultation.

To account for Piecraft's failure as a medical man several theories were in circulation, and it is probable that each of them contained an element of truth. Some persons would set it down to the shabbiness of his appearance, or to the brusqueness of his manners, or to the fact that his consulting-room often reeked with the fumes of cheap tobacco. Others would say that Piecraft was constitutionally

unable to practise those "intelligent hesitations" so often needed in the application of medical principles. They would remind you of his fatal tendency to determine diagnosis on a sudden impulse, which Piecraft called "psychological intuition," and in illustration of this they would tell you a story: how once, when the vicar's wife had brought her petted daughter to be treated for hysteria, the fit happening to come on in the consulting-room, Piecraft had cured the young lady on the spot by soundly boxing her ears. Concerning this incident he had been taken severely to task by an intimate friend of his, an old practitioner of standing. "It will be time enough to adopt those methods of treatment," the friend had said to him, "when you are earning five thousand a year. At the present stage of your career it is almost fatal. Learn so to treat a patient that the story of the cure when subsequently related after dinner may have the characteristics of High Tragedy, or at all events may reflect some credit on the sufferer. Help him to create a drama, and

see to it that he comes out ultimately as its hero. Don't you see that in the present instance you have spoilt a moving story, than which nothing gives greater offence, turning the whole situation into Low Comedy and making the patient a laughing-stock? People will never stand that, Piecraft. It is idle to insist that the cure was efficacious and permanent. So no doubt it was. A better remedy for that type of hysteria could not be devised. But reflect on the fact that you have deprived the vicar's family of a legitimate opportunity for dramatic expression and dethroned the vicar's daughter from her place as heroine. In short, you have committed an outrage on the artistic rights of medicine, and, mark my words, you will have to pay for it. Always remember, Piecraft, that in medicine, as in many other things, it is not the act alone which ensures success, but the gesture with which the act is accompanied."

Moreover, Piecraft held a theory which he never took the least pains to conceal, though it was extremely provoking to his patients

both rich and poor. His theory was that more than half the ailments of the human body are best treated by leaving them alone. For example, a certain old gentleman having consulted him about some senile malady, the doctor had dismissed him with the following remark: "My dear sir, the best remedy for the troubles of old age is to grow still older. The matter is in your own hands." Many such-like epigrams were reported of him, and often they constituted the sole return which the patients received for the two guineas deposited on the table of the consulting-room. Obviously this kind of thing could not go on. As most of his patients consulted Piecraft because they wished to be extensively interfered with, and objected to nothing so much as being left alone, with or without an epigram to console them, it followed of course that they seldom consulted him a second time.

But beneath these peripheral causes of irritation there lay a deeper offence. The truth is that Piecraft had made himself highly obnoxious to the members of his own profes-

sion, and had acquired—though I doubt if he fully deserved it—the reputation of a traitor. "Futile as physic" was a phrase constantly on his lips; and the words, offensive as they were, were only the foam that broke forth from the deeper waters of his treachery. He had gone so far as to embark on a propaganda for what he called "the Simplification of Medical Practice," publicly proposing that a Society should be founded for that object; and in pursuance of this proposal he had published a series of articles in which he had argued that the healing art is still dominated by the spirit of Magic and encumbered with a mass of dogmatic assumptions and superstitious observances. "The Seat of Authority in Therapeutics," "Medicine without Priest and without Ritual," "Big Words and Little Bottles," were the titles of some of these abominable essays. The last-named especially had aroused great indignation, not only by the excessively vehement language in which Piecraft pleaded for "simple and rational" principles, but far more by a caustic parallel he had drawn

between the doings of a successful London practitioner and the ritual of a medicine-man among the Australian aborigines. The offence went deep, and the matter became the more serious for Piecraft because the indignation extended from the doctors to the theologians, who suspected—though the suspicion was utterly unfounded—that under the cover of an attack on orthodox medicine he was really engaged in putting a knife, from the back, into official religion; a suspicion which deprived the unfortunate doctor of every one of his clerical patients, including their wives and daughters, at a single stroke.

The combined effect of all these causes was, of course, disastrous. If, for example, you happened to be suffering from a severe pain in the head—*le mal des beaux esprits*—which your family doctor had failed to cure, and suggested to the latter that Piecraft, as a distinguished cerebral pathologist, should be summoned to a consultation, you were pretty certain to be met with this rejoinder: "Yes, Piecraft has beyond all question an unrivalled

knowledge of the human brain. But please understand that if you call him in I shall have to retire from the case." And if you pressed for further explanation you would at first be put off with airs of mystery which would gradually consolidate into some such statement as this: "Well, in the profession we don't regard Piecraft as a medical man in the strict sense of the term. He is really a literary man who has mistaken his vocation"; or, "Nature intended Piecraft for a popular agitator"; or, "Piecraft's forte is journalism"; or, "Piecraft's title of 'doctor' should always be written in inverted commas"; or, "Piecraft is trying to live in two worlds, the world of imagination and the world of pure science; he will come to grief in both of them." And once the prophetic remark was made: "Piecraft's proper rôle is that of a character in the Arabian Nights." I have been told, too, that one day the Senior Physician of the hospital where Piecraft held a minor appointment overheard him muttering his favourite phrase by the bedside of a patient, "Futile as physic! futile

as physic!" Whereupon the Senior Physician stepped up to him and, laying his hand on his shoulder in the kindest possible manner, whispered in his ear, "Resign, Piecraft; resign!"

Dr Phippeny Piecraft had no belief in the immortality of the soul: his studies in cerebral pathology had disposed of that question long ago. "What a philosopher most requires," he used to reflect, "is not so much a big brain of his own as a little knowledge of the brains of other people. Hamlet, for example, if he had studied Yorick's brain instead of sentimentalising over his skull, might have framed his question differently. And as to Hegel—well, that thing knocked all the Hegelism out of me," and he glanced at the gold medal in the glass case.

But, like many another man who disbelieves in the future life, Dr Piecraft was not a little curious as to what might happen to him after death. He was indulging that curiosity on the very evening we first encounter him.

"There is a pill in that little bottle," he was thinking, "which would end the whole wretched business in something less than thirty seconds. I wonder I don't swallow it. I should do it if it were not for Jim. But no, I shouldn't! Hamlet, old boy, you were quite right. I'm as big a coward as the rest of them. There's just a chance that if I were to swallow that pill I should find myself in hell-fire in half a minute—and I'm not fool enough, or not hero enough, to run it. Of course, there's just a chance of heaven too; for, after all, I've been a decent sort of chap, and, as Stevenson says, there's an ultimate decency in the Universe. *Heaven!*—my stars, heaven doesn't attract me! I've never yet heard a description of heaven which doesn't make it almost as bad as the other place. Extraordinary, that when people try to conceive a better world than this they almost invariably picture something infinitely worse! Mahomet knew that: 'cute fellow, Mahomet. And yet he was no more successful than the rest."

Piecraft's reflections, once started on that

line, plunged further. "I wonder what sort of heaven *would* attract me," he thought. "Let me see. Why, yes! If I could be sure of going to a place where I should be professionally busy all day long, plenty of interesting and difficult cases, and no need to worry about Jim's education and his future —I'd swallow the pill this instant. *By heaven*, I would! I'd do harder things than that. I'd stick it out in this wretched hole for another ten years, I'd give up smoking shag, I'd give up everything, except Jim—if only at the end of the time I could go to some heaven where the stream of patients would never cease! I really don't think I could accept salvation on any other terms. But wait! Yes, there is just one other offer I would look at. If only they'd let me go back to the old home in Gower Street, if they'd make the old street *look* as it did in those days, and *smell* as it did, and give tobacco the same taste it had then, and show me Dad standing at the window with Jim in his arms, and let me be in love again with that nice girl at the Slade School—yes,

and if they'd let me go into the shilling seats at the Lyceum to see Mary Anderson as Perdita—by Gad, I'd take the pill for that, indeed I would!"

He was pursuing these reflections when his housekeeper entered the room with three or four letters. He looked them over, and his face brightened when he saw that one of them was from his half-brother Jim. A pipe was instantly filled and Piecraft re-settled himself in his arm-chair with the open letter in his hand. Jim's letter was dated from Harrow and ran as follows:—

"DEAR PHIP,—Many thanks for your congratulations on my eighteenth birthday and for the enclosure of two pounds. Don't be angry, old chap, when I tell you how I spent them. I got leave at once to go down town, and bought you a silk hat, a pair of gloves, some collars, and a couple of ties. You will get them all to-morrow, and I hope the hat and gloves are the right size. I am pretty sure they are. I was half inclined to buy you a box of cigars,

but I thought you needed the other things more.

"The fact of the case is, Phip, I have definitely made up my mind to be a burden on you no longer. True, I might get a scholarship at the 'Varsity, as I got one at Harrow. But you would still have to pinch to maintain me; and when I remember how long you have done it already, I feel a perfect beast. I am old enough now to understand what it means, and I tell you, Phip, that nothing will induce me to come back to Harrow after the present term. So please give notice at once. I mean to go out to the Colonies with a man from the Modern Side, and I shall earn my living somehow—as a labourer if need be, for I am big and strong enough. Indeed, I would rather enlist than go on with this.

"Have you ever thought of trying to make a bit *by writing*, Phip? I believe you could write a novel. Don't you remember what bully stories you used to tell me when I was a kid? Have a shot at it, old boy. There's a

person here in the Sixth who has a knack that way, and he made a hundred pounds by a thing he wrote. He got the tip for it out of a book on the art of novel-writing, the advertisement of which I have cut out of the *Daily Mail* and send you enclosed. I would have sent you the book itself had there been enough left out of the two pounds. But there was only fourpence.

"The Head preached a capital sermon last night on the text, 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.' The instant he gave out the words I thought of you, old Phip. And I went on thinking of you till he had done. That's how I know the sermon was a good one, though I didn't listen to another word. Anything that makes me think of you *must* be good. Phip, *you are a dead cert. for heaven when you die.* But don't die yet, there's a good chap. For if you go, I shall go too.—Ever yours, JIM.

"*P.S.*—Don't forget to give notice that I am leaving this term."

When Dr Piecraft laid down the letter his eyes were full of tears. "The only bit of

heaven that's left me," he said aloud, "is going to be taken away. There's one person in the world, anyhow, who doesn't think me a failure. If you go to the Colonies, Jim, I shall take the pill, come what may. You're a warm-hearted boy, Jim, but cruel too. I'd rather spend a hundred a year on you and go threadbare in consequence, than earn ten thousand a year and not have you to spend it on. At the same time, my only chance of making you relent is to earn some money. — What the deuce is all this about novel-writing?"

He took up the advertisement which had fallen in his lap, and read as follows: "How to Write Novels — a Guide to Fortune in Literature. Containing Practical Instructions for Amateurs, whereby Success is assured. By an Old Hand."

Next morning Piecraft bought the book. As no patients came that day he had ample leisure to read it. "Easy as lying," he said to himself when he had finished. "I see the

trick of it. And, by George, I'll make the first attempt this very night. I have half a dozen ideas already. Cerebral pathology is no bad training for a novelist."

So he sat down to work, and by two in the morning had written the first chapter of a very promising novel. In ten days more the novel was complete.

Reading over his manuscript, and severely criticising himself by the rules of his Manual, he found that he had put in too much scenery, had undercoloured the beauty of the heroine, had forgotten to describe her dress, and had introduced no action to break the tedious sentiment of the love-dialogues. These errors he at once set himself to correct, pruning down the excesses and making good the defects. Then, reviewing the whole, he satisfied himself that he had done well. The plot turned on a love affair, and was easily intelligible. The sexes were evenly balanced, and every character had its foil. There was plenty of incident and continuous action. And the whole was unified by a single purpose or controlling idea.

This last gave Piecraft peculiar satisfaction. He had feared when he began that unity of purpose would be of all the rules the most difficult to satisfy. In the purpose of his life he had failed; was it likely, he asked himself, that he would do any better in romance? Judge, then, of his pleasure on discovering that a clear thread of intention ran through the novel from the first sentence to the last, and came to adequate fulfilment in the final catastrophe. "Purpose," he reflected, "is going to be my strongest point. I shall score heavily on that."

He sent his manuscript to a publisher, and was rejoiced to hear of its acceptance within a week. In the six months that followed, having little else to do, he produced two more novels. Each of them had a Purpose. The publisher bought the manuscripts outright for fifty pounds apiece.

"It's the Purpose that pays," thought Piecraft. "It's the Purpose that works the oracle. It's the Purpose the public like. Next time I'll introduce more Purpose and stand out for better terms with the publisher."

Meanwhile he had been compelled, much against his will, to give notice of Jim's withdrawal from school. In spite of the brightening of his prospects the half-brother had proved inexorable. "I will borrow from you," wrote Jim, "enough to pay my third-class fare across the ocean and leave me with a pound or two on landing. After that, not another penny." "All right, Jim; have it your own way," was Phippeny's answer. "I shall work away until I have saved £500, and then, my boy, *I'll join you on the other side and life will begin again for both of us.* Meanwhile, I'm growing uncommonly prolific in the way of pot-boilers. But I'm not exactly in love with it, and shall abandon my new profession without a sigh. I wish I could produce something really good. Perhaps when I join you I shall get a new inspiration. I believe one can find a pen and ink in the Colonies."—Thus the matter was arranged.

Dr Phippeny Piecraft was not in the habit of going to church, but one Sunday evening,

shortly after these events, he found himself there by accident and heard a sermon, some sentences of which caught his attention. It happened that just then he was gravelled for lack of matter; and he was busy during the service in vainly attempting to construct a plot in which a gamekeeper's daughter was to be betrayed by a young lord under circumstances of excruciating novelty. In spite of the novelty of the circumstances he could not help recognising that the main theme was a trifle stale; and as they were singing the hymn before the sermon he confessed to himself that the plot was not worth elaboration, and began to think about other things.

Piecraft's mind, indeed, was just then in a state of extreme confusion. Now he would be listening to the words of the preacher, now giving way to anxieties about Jim, now returning to the plot of his novel like a moth to a candle-light, and now reflecting, with the acute discomfort of a double consciousness, on his inability to concentrate his thoughts. "There is nothing," he mused, "which sooner

demoralises a man's intelligence than the discovery that he can make money by following the demand of a degenerate public taste. It leads to mental incoherence and to the most extraordinary self-deception. I am afraid that that cursed Manual has undone me. It seems to have resurrected another personality who belongs to a lower order of being than my true and proper self. Having failed to earn my living by being the man I am, I am now in a way to make money by being the man I am not. What business have I to be constructing these ridiculous plots? And how is it that, once started on that line, I am unable to prevent myself going further? I had thought that a scientific training was the best safeguard against obsession. But I perceive it is no such thing. Is it possible that I am so far like Frate Alberigo—my proper soul expelled to another world, and perhaps practising medicine there, while a demon holds possession of my body and writes third-rate novels in this?"

A moment later he was thinking about Jim.

"I hope the boy won't forget to send me a cable when he reaches the port; somehow I feel unaccountably anxious about him." Then he turned to wondering how much he would be able to screw out of the publishers for the next novel, and how everything would depend on the breadth of the Purpose.

Suddenly a sentence of the sermon caught his ear: "*Illusion is an integral part of Reality.*"

"Tip-top," thought Piecraft. "So it is." And in a moment his imagination began to cast about for a reality of which three parts should be illusion. But he could think of nothing that answered the description, and again he said to himself, "I am not in a normal condition to-day. One should never force a reluctant brain. And I can't help being anxious about Jim. I had better turn my attention to the sermon."

"For example," the preacher was just then saying, "many a man who has determined to abandon the pursuit of happiness has subsequently realised that he was still pursuing

happiness in another form. Others have found that actions which they thought they were doing for the love of God were really done out of hatred of the devil. . . . Nor can we ever be sure that we are the authors of our own acts. No doubt we usually think we are. But if the testimony of holy men—and of bad men too—counts for anything, we shall be forced to the conclusion that many acts which we think *we* have performed have really been performed by some person who is not ourselves, or by some force or motivation whose source is not in our own souls. This, my friends, applies to our bad actions as well as to our good ones. Thus we see how of all reality, even of moral reality, illusion is an integral part."

Dr Phippeny Piecraft did not trouble himself for one instant about the truth or error of these doctrines. An idea suddenly leaped into his mind as he heard them, and the preacher had hardly concluded the last period before the novelist saw himself secure of at least eighty pounds for his next manuscript. Such

are the strange reactions which the best-meant sermons often provoke in the minds of the hearers, especially when there is genius in the congregation.

The title of his new novel was the first thing that came into Piecraft's head. It was to be called *Dual Personality*, and cerebral pathology was to supply the atmosphere. The plot came next—at least the outline of it. The main actors were to be two young lords, or something of that sort, the one as good as they make them and the other as bad. Each of these young lords was to play the part of motivating force to the actions of the other. "We'll call them A and B," reflected Phippeny. "A, the good young lord, shall intend nothing but good and do nothing but evil. B, the bad one, shall intend nothing but evil and do nothing but good: that is, A's actions shall represent B's character, and *vice versa*. Each, of course, must be exhibited as under the influence of the other; and this mutual influence must be so strong that A's virtues are converted by B's influence into vices, and

B's vices by A's influence into virtues. Thus each of them shall be the author, not of his own actions, but of the actions of his friend. A splendid idea, and one that has never yet occurred to any novelist living or dead! It is certain to lead to some tremendous situations."

Before the sermon concluded the pot was beginning to simmer. Several situations had been rapidly sketched by way of experiment: a trial trip, so to say, had been taken. For example: Scene, a labyrinthine wood. Time, the dead of night. An intermittent moonlight, and a gale causing strange voices in the tree-tops. The bad young lord, on his way to the gamekeeper's daughter, is stealing among the trees. Suddenly a figure steps into his path. It is the good young lord. Conversation: upshot—the bad young lord resolves to take Holy Orders. Takes them, but becomes a worse villain than before; psychology to be arranged later. Second situation: good young lord now leader of Labour movement: the bad young lord (in Orders)

persuades the other, by casuistry, to misapply trust funds to support coal-strike. And so on and so on. End: Archbishopric for villain, penal servitude for hero. Reader all the time kept in doubt as to which is villain and which hero; and sometimes led to think, by cerebral pathology, that the two men are one personality—the two halves of one brain. Counter-plot for the women—each lord in love with the woman who is matched to the other. Keynote of whole—tragic irony.

Piecraft had advanced thus far when his mind received another jostle. His attention was again caught by the words of the sermon. "I have heard," the preacher was saying, "of a distinguished author who, on reading one of his own books ten years after it was written, entirely failed to recognise it as his own work, and insisted that it had been written by somebody else. Such is the force of illusion."

"The fellow's an idiot," thought Piecraft, "to believe such a story. The thing couldn't happen. At least, I'm pretty sure it will never happen to *me*. None the less, it might be

worked in for a literary effect." And again he fell to musing.

The preacher was now coming to the end of his sermon. He had been saying something about the relations of St Paul to the older apostles, and about the various illusions current at the time; and then, after alluding to St Paul's sojourn in the wilderness of Arabia, was winding up a period with the following questions: "But meanwhile, my brethren, where is Peter? Where is John? Where is James? And what are they doing?"

"*Where is James?*" These, and what followed them, were the only words that penetrated to Piecraft's intelligence, and they struck so sharply into the current of his thoughts that he almost forgot himself. He sat bolt upright, opened his mouth, and was on the point of shouting an answer to the question, when he suddenly remembered where he was and checked himself in time. The answer he had on the tip of his tongue was this: "*James, so far as I can judge, is just getting into wire-*

less touch with New York, but I would to God I knew what he was doing!"

A moment later he was thinking, "I'm getting light-headed, and shall be making an ass of myself if I'm not careful. I'm certainly not in my usual health. What the deuce is the matter with me? When, I wonder, shall I have news of Jim's arrival?"

When Piecraft left the church he was in a state of acute depression and distress. His pulse was throbbing and his head aching, and it seemed to him as he paced the streets that the preacher was following close behind him, and constantly repeating the question, "Where is James, where is James?" Sometimes the voice would sound like a distant echo, sometimes like a mocking cry.

On reaching home he said to his housekeeper: "Mrs Avory, I shall be glad if you will sit up till you hear me go to bed. For the first time in my life I am afraid of being left alone. I can't imagine what has come over me."

He tried to read the paper, to write a letter,

to play the piano; paced the floor; wandered into the housekeeper's sitting-room; went out for a walk and came back after going twenty yards. Then he took up a volume of his favourite *Arabian Nights* and found, after reading a page, that he had not understood a sentence of the print. Towards midnight his agitation was so great that he could bear it no longer. He rang the bell.

"Mrs Avory," he said, "something has gone wrong with me—or with somebody else. I can't help thinking about James—and fancying all sorts of things. I believe I am going mad. In heaven's name, what am I to do?"

"Well, sir," said the woman, "you are a doctor and should know better than I. But if I were you, sir, I'd take a sleeping draught and go to bed."

In despair Piecraft took the woman's advice. As a doctor he avoided the use of every kind of drug on principle, and was terrified when he realised how much morphia he had put into the draught. "Now indeed I am mad," he

thought, "for the smallest dose of morphia was always enough to give me the horrors."

His fears were not ungrounded. There is no record of what he saw, fancied, or suffered during the night and the following day; but when he entered his dining-room late next evening, Mrs Avory started as though she had seen a ghost. "Give me the newspaper," he cried, and before she could prevent him he snatched it out of her hand.

"'*Titanic*' *sinks after collision with iceberg. Enormous loss of life*"—were the first words he read.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed.

Those who saw the tragic throng of men and women who for the next few days hung round the doors of the White Star offices in London will not have forgotten that poor fellow who was beside himself—how he would walk among the crowd accosting this person and that, and how he would then take off his hat, or his gloves, or pull at his tie and say, "Look at this hat, sir; look at those gloves;

look at that tie! Jim gave me those, sir. He bought them with two pounds I gave him to spend on himself. What do you think of that for a noble act? And I tell you that Jim's lying at this moment fathoms deep in the ocean. He's among the lost, sir; by God, I know it. A mere boy in years, madam, only eighteen last birthday; but a man in character. Loyal to the core! And take my word for one thing. Jim played the man at the last, sir; you bet your stars he did! He didn't wear a lifebelt; not he—that is, if there was a woman around who hadn't got one! A man who would spend his money as he spent those two pounds wouldn't keep a lifebelt for himself. Would he, now? Look at this hat! Look at these gloves! Look at that tie!" . . . .

For two whole days Piecraft maintained this requiem. On the evening of the second day some kind-hearted fellow-sufferer persuaded him to go home, and volunteered to bear him company. It was a long hour's journey to the other end of London. A telegraph boy arrived at the house at the same

moment as the two men and handed Piecraft a telegram. He broke it open and read. Then he suddenly tore off his hat, and, handing it with a quick movement to his companion, staggered forward and collapsed on the doorstep.

. . . . . .

When he came to himself he was lying on the sofa in his study. In the room were several people who, as soon as Piecraft opened his eyes, gazed upon him attentively for a few moments and then, nodding to each other, as though to say "all right," quietly withdrew.

The novelist looked round him. Yes, he was assuredly in his own familiar room. But one thing struck him as strange. The room was usually in a state of extreme disorder—dust everywhere, books and papers lying about in confusion, hats, sticks, pipes, photographs and golf-balls mingling in the chaos. Now everything was neat and orderly. The furniture had been polished, the carpet cleaned, the hearth swept up and the fire-irons in their place. On the table, too, was a vase of flowers.

"There must have been a spring cleaning,' he thought.

He felt remarkably well. "I believe that I fell asleep during a sermon. Well, the sleep has done me good and cleared my brain. But who on earth brought me here? Strange: but I'll think it out when I have time. Just now I want to write. That was a capital idea for my new novel. I must work it out at once while the inspiration is still active; for I never felt keener and fitter in my life. Let me see.—Yes, *Dual Personality* was to be the title." These were his first reflections.

Then without more ado he sat down to the table; lit his pipe; ruminated for five minutes, and began to write.

He wrote rapidly and continuously for many hours, and midnight had passed when Piecraft flung down the last sheet on the floor and uttered a triumphant "Done!"

"I thought," he said aloud, "that it would run to at least 100,000 words. But I don't believe there's a fifth that number. The thing has come out a Short Story. Never mind,

I'm safe for a twenty-pound note anyhow. Not so bad for one day's work. I'll read it over in the morning." Then, feeling hungry, he rang the bell.

To his great surprise there entered not the fussy old lady who usually waited on him, but a girl neatly dressed and with a remarkably intelligent face.

"Are you the new servant?" said he.

The girl made no reply, but, having placed food on the table, withdrew. "As modest as she is pretty," thought Piecraft as he ate his meal. "Well, I'll give her no cause to complain of me. And I hope she'll continue to wait on me. For in all my life I never knew bread and wine to taste so delicious."

On the following morning he had barely finished his breakfast, supplied him in the same silent manner, when a tap came at the door and a young man stepped into the room. "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" said he.

"Who are you?" said Piecraft. "I have never seen you before."

"Oh," said the young man, "I'm a messenger. Your friends have sent me to look after you."

"It's the first time they have ever done such a thing," returned the other, "and I'm much obliged to them. Anyhow, you came at the right time. There *is* something you can do for me; at least I think so. Can you read aloud?"

"I like nothing better," said the young man.

"Well, then, you are the very man I want. It so happens that I wrote a story for the press last night, and I was just wishing that I had a kind friend who would do me the service of reading it aloud. There's nothing that gives an author a better idea of the effect of his work than to hear it read aloud."

"I will read it with the greatest pleasure," said the youth.

"Then let us get to work at once," said Piecraft—and he handed his manuscript across the table.

The young man settled himself in a good

light and began to read. The first sentence ran as follows:

"*For the fourth time that day, Abdulla, the water-seller of Damascus, had come to the river's bank to fill his water-skin.*"

"Stop!" cried Piecraft. "I never wrote that! I must have given you the wrong manuscript. What is the title on the outside?"

"*The Hole in the Water-skin*," answered the reader.

"It's not the title of my story," said Piecraft. "Here, hand the papers over to me and let me look at them. Extraordinary! Where did this thing come from? I presume you're attempting some kind of practical joke. What have you done with the manuscript I gave you?"

"The confusion will soon pass," said the other.

"Confusion, indeed!" answered Piecraft, as his eye glanced over the sheets. "You've hit the right word this time, my boy. For the odd thing is that the whole piece is written in my hand and on my paper, and is, I could

swear, the identical bundle of sheets I laid away last night. And yet there is not a word in it I can recognise as my own. But wait—what's this on page 32? I see something about 'dual personality.' That was the title of my story. But no! The words are scratched out. Yes, a whole page—two pages—more pages—are deleted at that point. What on earth does it all mean?"

"Perhaps," said the young man, "if you allow me to read the whole to you, your connection with the story will gradually become clear."

"You had better do so," answered Piecraft. "At all events, read on till I stop you. For, from what I see, I don't like the fellow's style, and may soon grow tired of it. And make a point of reading the portions that are scratched out."

"I shall remember your wishes," said the other; "and as to not liking the fellow's style, I think you may find that it is to some extent founded on your own."

"I don't believe it," said Piecraft. "Any-

how, if he hasn't been copying my style, he has been stealing my ideas. The passage about 'dual personality' proves it. But go ahead, and let us hear what it's all about."

The young man again settled himself in a good light and read as follows.

II

"THE HOLE IN THE WATER-SKIN"

For the fourth time that day Abdulla, the water-seller of Damascus, had come to the river's bank to fill his water-skin. The day was hot beyond endurance; the drinkers had been clamorous and trade had been brisk; and a bag of small money, the fruits of his merchandise, hung within the folds of his gaberdine.

Weary with going to and fro in the burning streets, Abdulla seated himself under a palm tree, the last of a long line that ran down to the pool where the skins were filled. Resting his back against the cool side of the tree, the setting sun being behind him, he drew forth his bag and counted his coins. "One more journey," he said to himself, "and the bag will be full. Zobeida shall have sweetmeats to-morrow."

The pleasing thought lingered in his mind; fled for a moment and then returned; Abdulla saw the shop of the infidel Greek, with boxes of chocolate in the window; he saw himself inside making his choice among innumerable boxes, and holding the bag of money in his hand. Then his head fell forward on his chest and he was asleep.

The plunge into sleep had been so sudden, and its duration was so brief, that no memory of it was left, and Abdulla knew not that he had slept nor the moment when he awaked. Fluctuating images rose and wavered and vanished; and then, as though in answer to a signal, the incoherence ceased, the forms became defined, and a steady stream of consciousness began to flow.

He was conscious of the figure of a man in the foreground whose presence he had not previously noticed. The man was sitting motionless on a low rock less than a stone-cast distant, and close to the river's brim; and he seemed to be watching the still flow of the stream. A moment later he stood upright,

turned round, and crossed the fifty paces of sand that lay between him and Abdulla.

As the man drew nearer, Abdulla observed that he bore a bewildering resemblance to himself. Not many minutes before he had been looking at his own reflection in a small pocket mirror which he had purchased that morning from a Jew as a present for Zobeida; and as he had looked at the image, still thinking of Zobeida, he wished that God had bestowed upon him a countenance of nobler cast. The face he now saw before him was the face he had just seen in the mirror, with the nobler cast introduced; and Abdulla, noticing the difference as well as the resemblance, was afraid.

"Depart from me, O my master," said he, "for I am a man of no account." And he bowed himself to the ground.

"Rise," said the other, "and make haste; for the sun is low, and scarce an hour remains for thy merchandise. Dip thy water-skin into the stream; and, as thou dippest, think on the hour of thy death, when the All-merciful will

dip into the river of thy life, and thou shalt sleep for the twinkling of an eye, and know not when thou awakest, and there shall be no mark left on thee, even as no mark is left on the river when thou hast filled thy water-skin from its abundance."

"I know not what thou sayest," said Abdulla, "for I am a poor man and ignorant."

"Thou art young," said the other, "and there is time for thee to learn. Hear, then, and I will enlighten thee. Everything hath its double, and the double is redoubled again. To this world there is a next before and a next after, and to each next a nearest, through a counting that none can complete. Worlds without end lie enfolded one within another like the petals of a rose; and as the fragrance of one petal penetrates and intermingles with the fragrance of all the rest, so is the vision of the world thou seest now blended with the vision of that which was and of that which is to come. And I tell thee, O thou seller of water, that between this world and its next fellow the difference is so faint that none save

the enlightened can discern it. A man may live a thousand lives, as thou hast already done, and dream but of one. Again thou shalt sleep and again thou shalt awake, and the world of thy sleeping shall differ from the world of thy waking no more than thy full water-skin differs from itself when two drops of water have fallen from its mouth."

"Thou speakest like a devotee," answered Abdulla. "The matter of thy discourse is utterly beyond me, save for that thou sayest concerning the dipping of the water-skin. There thy thought is as the echo of mine own. But know that I am ashamed in thy presence; and again I entreat thee to depart." And Abdulla bowed himself as before.

"Do, then, as I bid thee," said the man; "dip thy skin in the water of the flowing river, think on the hour of thy death, and forget not as thou dippest to pronounce the name of God."

Then Abdulla rose up and did what he was commanded to do. While he was dipping the skin he tried to think of the hour of his death;

but he could think only of the words, and dying seemed to him a thing of naught; for he was young and Zobeida was fair. Nevertheless, when he had lifted the full skin from the river, and saw that his taking left no mark, an old thought came back to him, and for the thousandth time he began to wonder at the ways of flowing water. "Only God can understand them," he murmured. "May the Compassionate have mercy upon the ignorant!"

Then he adjusted the burden on his back and turned to the palm-belt. But the stranger was gone.

As one who walks in sleep, Abdulla retraced the path on which for more than half the year he came and went three or four times a day. Now he pondered the words of his visitant; now the image of flowing water rose and glided before the inner eye.

He passed under the gate of the city without noting where he was. But here a sudden jostle interrupted his reverie. A man driving a string of donkeys thrust him against the wall, cursing him as he passed. Abdulla

looked up and, when he heard the curses, repeated the name of God as a protection against evil.

Re-settling the water-skin in the position from which it had been displaced by the collision with the donkey, he took up the thread of his musing and went on. He thought of Zobeida, of the Cadi, of the contract of marriage, of the sweetmeats he would purchase on the morrow, of the shop of the Greek. But again his reverie was broken; this time by the sound of his own voice. The cry of his trade had burst automatically from his lips: "Water; sweet water! Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come and buy!"

A vision lay before him, and he seemed to be gazing at it from a point in mid-air. He saw a street in Damascus; the crowd is coming and going, the merchants are in their shops, and some are crying their wares. Close by the door of a house a boy is holding forth a wooden bowl, and in front of him a water-seller is in the act of opening his water-skin. Abdulla watches the filling of

the bowl, and sees the man put forth his hand to take the coin the boy is offering. The man touches the coin and instantly becomes Abdulla himself! Abdulla closes his water-skin and replaces it on his back, not without a momentary sense of bewilderment. He observes also that some of the water is spilt on the ground. But he has no memory of the spilling.

Abdulla would fain have questioned himself. But he found no question to ask and could not begin the interrogation. Something seemed to have disturbed him, but so completely had it vanished that he could give the disturbance neither form nor name. Otherwise the chain of his memory was unbroken. He had finished his last round for the day; scarce a cup of water remained in the skin, and as he flung the flaccid thing over his shoulder he began to recall, one by one, the names and faces of his customers, forty in all, reflecting with satisfaction that the last skinful had brought him the best gains of the day. Then he remembered the driver of donkeys who had

thrust him against the wall, and, examining the skin, found that it was frayed almost to bursting. And Abdulla uttered a curse on the driver and turned homewards.

His road lay through narrow streets, crowded with people, and as he passed down one of them a veiled woman cried to him from the door of a hovel.

"O compassionate water-seller, I have two children within who are sore athirst, for the fever is burning them. Give them, I pray thee, a mouthful of water, and Allah shall recompense thee in Paradise."

"Woman," said Abdulla, "there is less water in the skin than would suffice to cool the tongue of a soul in hell. Nevertheless, what I have I will give thee." And he lowered the mouth of his water-skin into the woman's bowl.

Not a drop came forth. In vain Abdulla shook the skin and pressed the corners between the palms of his hands. Then, discovering what had happened, he began to curse and to swear.

"By the beard of the Prophet," he cried, "the skin has burst! A driver of donkeys, begotten of Satan, thrust me against the wall at the entering in of the city, and frayed the water-skin. And now, by the permission of God, the heat has dried up the remnant of the water and cracked the skin, thus completing the work of the Deviser of Mischief. Alas, alas! for the skin was borrowed. And to-morrow restitution will be demanded, for the lender is likewise a son of the Devil, and the bowels of mercy are not within him."

"Verily thou raisest a great cry for a small evil," said the woman. "Bethink thee of them who are perishing with thirst, and hold thy peace."

"Nay, but I am mindful of them," said Abdulla; "for had not the water-skin been burst, I would have had the wherewithal to give them to drink. But know, O mother of sorrows, that the motives of mankind are of a mixed nature, especially when grief oppresseth them. And my griefs are greater than thou deemest. Woe is me! Behold this

bag of money, and raise thy voice with mine in lamentation over the miseries of the unfortunate. A damsel, more beautiful than the full moon seen beyond the summits of waving palms, is at this hour hungering for the sweetmeats of the infidel, even as the children of thy body are thirsting for water; and within this bag is the money which, by the favour of Allah, would have purchased abundance of all that she desireth. But ere to-morrow's sun has risen from the edge of the desert, four coins out of every five will be claimed as damages by the lender of the skin (whom may the Prophet utterly reject!), the rest being reserved for the daily food which the All-merciful provides for his creatures. And the damsel will sit in the corner of the house, rocking her goodly body, which was created for the angels to gaze upon; and she will bite her hands and beat them on the wall, and wail for the sweetmeats that come not, and curse the name of Abdulla, the breaker of vows!"

"Most excellent of water-sellers," said the woman, "many are the damsels in this city

addicted to the sweetmeats of the infidel, and of those that are beautiful as the full moon beyond the waving palms there are not a few. Thy description, therefore, availeth not for the identification of thy beloved. Describe her more narrowly, I beseech thee, that hereafter, when my children are dead, I may bring her the balm of consolation. For I am afflicted in her woes; and between women in sorrow there is ever a bond."

"Yea, verily," answered Abdulla. "I will so describe my beloved that thou shall recognise her among ten thousand. Know, then, that her form is like unto a minaret of ivory built by the Waters of Silence in a king's garden; her eyes are as lighted lamps in the house of the Enchanter; the flowing of her hair is a troop of wild horses pursued by Bedouîn in the wilderness of Arabia; and the fragrance of her coming is like an odour of precious nards wafted on the evening breeze from the Islands of Wak-Wak."

"O Abdulla," replied the other, "of a truth I know this damsel. And now I per-

ceive that the Devourer of Bliss hath taken thee in his net and multiplied thy sorrows upon thy head. But forget not the grief of this thy handmaid, and the suffering of those she has nursed at the breast. Hear even now the wailing that is within! Lo, a worker of spells has sent destruction among us, and the sickness is sore in the habitations of the poor. Press, then, thy skin once more, if peradventure Allah may have left there one drop of water, that the mouth of the little ones may be moistened before they die. And add a curse, I pray thee, on the Worker of Spells; for the Giver of Gifts hath made thy tongue of great alacrity, and taught thee the putting-together of wise judgments and the rounding-off of memorable sayings."

By this time a crowd, attracted by the cries and the cursing, had gathered round the speakers, and so thick was the press that Abdulla had much ado to move his hands that he might press the water-skin as he was bidden.

"O wise and much-enduring woman," he

cried, "I greatly fear me that thy prayer is vain. But I will even do as thou biddest, if only these foolish ones will make room that I may pass my hands craftily over the skin. Thereafter I will add a goodly curse on the worker of spells, and at the last thou and I and all this multitude will wail and lament together, that the heart of the All-merciful may be moved to pity and his will turned to work us good."

So spake Abdulla, and the crowd began to give way. But, behold, a marching squad of soldiery, going to the war, with drums beating and bayonets all aflash, suddenly swings down the street, filling its whole breadth from side to side. Instantly the crowd backs, and Abdulla and the woman, separated from one another, are swept along as driftwood by the torrent. Arrived in the open space into which the street discharged, Abdulla rushes hither and thither in search of the woman, examining every face in the crowd, and raising himself on tiptoe that he may look over their heads. But the woman is nowhere to be seen.

Perturbed by the sudden disappearance of the woman, Abdulla turned once more into the homeward way. Before he had taken many steps it occurred to him to examine the rent in his water-skin. Standing quite still and holding the skin at arm's length before him, he gazed intently at the small hole, about the size of an olive-stone, which had resulted from the donkey-driver's assault. As he thus gazed, the incident which had so abruptly terminated a few minutes before seemed to retreat into the distant past. Then it became a story, heard he knew not where, about a water-seller who lived long ago. Next, it seemed a dream of the night before, the details of which he could not recall. Finally, it vanished from his memory altogether.

Abdulla, realising that it was gone, turned quickly and found, with some surprise, that he was standing in front of a large shop with plate-glass windows, behind which were boxes of chocolate arranged in rows. A mirror — at least it seemed so to Abdulla, —of equal length with the shop front, was

set at the back and doubled the objects in the window.

The sight of the sweetmeats instantly brought back the memory of his misfortunes, and, in so doing, gave an occasion to the Tempter.

"I will conceal what has happened from the lender of the skin," thought Abdulla. "I will insert a cunning patch, which will assuredly burst so soon as the skin is filled with water, and I will then swear by God and the Prophet that the skin was patched when I borrowed it. And now I will go in and bargain with the infidel for yonder box, the circumference whereof is wide as the belly of a well-fattened sheep."

Raising his eyes from the great box of chocolates, Abdulla's attention was strangely arrested by the reflection of his own face and figure in the mirror at the back of the shop front. He noted, with a start, the unwonted dignity of the figure as thus presented, and immediately recalled the man who had accosted him but lately by the Water-sellers' Pool.

Abdulla gazed on what was before him, and thought thus within himself, "Of a truth I knew not that Allah had bestowed so dignified a countenance on the least worthy of his servants. The eyes are the eyes of eagles; the nose is a promontory looking seawards; the brow is a tower of brass built for defence at the gateway of a kingdom. Verily, the mirror of Zobeida must have been at fault. Surely God hath now provided me, in my own countenance, with the means of endearment, and the sweetmeats of the infidel are needed not. Moreover, it becometh not one thus favoured to deal crookedly with the followers of the Prophet. Is Abdulla a man of violence, as the driver of the donkey; or a man of no bowels, as the lender of the skin? Is he an accursed Greek or a more accursed Armenian that he should play the cheat with his neighbour, inserting a cunning patch, which will assuredly produce leakage and make the rent worse than before? God forbid! Abdulla is a man of pure occupation, even as yonder image reveals him. Nevertheless, it may be

that the Author of Deception has fashioned a lying picture in the mirror, that he may cause me to forgo the purchase of the box, and undo me with the beloved, who will soil her cheeks with rivers of tears, and rock her body in the corner of the house. Go to, now; I will see whether the Evil One be not hidden behind the mirror; or if, perchance, there be not here some witchcraft contrivance of the Franks."

So thinking, Abdulla stepped into the entry of the shop, that he might examine the back of the mirror. What was his astonishment on discovering that there was no mirror at all, the boxes of chocolate he had taken for reflections being just as real as all the rest!

The Greek proprietor, suspecting him to be a thief, rushed out to apprehend him. He was too late, for Abdulla had fled into the darkness.

The sudden night had fallen; aloft, in a firmament of violet-black, the great stars were shining, and the city was still.

Pursuing his way, Abdulla found himself in front of a lofty house with a solitary latticed window immediately beneath the roof. It was the appointed hour. Presently a handkerchief was waved from between the lattice, and the soft voice of a woman began to speak.

"O Abdulla, my beloved," said the voice, "though it be dark in the street, yet there is a light round about thee so that I can see thy countenance as if it were noonday. Wherefore hast thou anointed thyself with radiance, and made thyself to shine like the sons of the morning? Where hast thou been? For thy fashion is passing strange, and my heart turns to water at the sight of thee."

"I have been," said Abdulla, "in the company of the wise, who have taught me the way of understanding, and shown me all knowledge, and opened the dark things that are hidden in the secret parts of the earth. All day have I conversed with enlightened and honourable men, and they have made me the chief of their company and the father of their sect."

"Begone, then," answered the woman, "for

I know thee not, and thy comeliness makes me afraid. I had deemed that thou wert Abdulla, the seller of water; and I am even now prepared to let down a basket that he may place therein the thing for which my soul is an hungered, even the sweetmeats of the infidel, which I would then draw up again with a cord of silk, and be refreshed after my manner. But as for the ways of understanding, thou mayest tread them alone, and the opening up of that which is hidden is a thing that my soul hateth."

"O thou that speakest behind the lattice," said Abdulla, "thy discourse is of matters that lack importance in the eyes of the sagacious. I perceive thou art possessed by a demon, and surmise that the Whetter of Appetite is leading thee in the path of destruction. Retire, therefore, to thy inner chamber, and recite quickly the Seven Exorcisms and the Two Professions of Faith."

"O Abdulla, if indeed thou art he," replied the voice, "I discern thou art contending for a purpose. Peradventure, the eyes of the

wanton have entangled thee in the way, and thou hast bestowed on another that which, when thy heart was upright, thou designedst for me. Come now and prove thine integrity, for I will presently let down the basket that thou mayest fill it with the delicacies of the Franks."

"Thou fallest deeper into the snares of the demon," said Abdulla, "and thy voice soundeth afar off, even as the voice of one crying for water from the flames of the nethermost pit. Know that he to whom thou speakest is of them that walk in the light; and what have these to do with the delicacies of the Franks? Verily, I understand not thy topic, having heard but a rumour thereof among the conversations of the ignorant."

"O despiser of the knowledge that sweetens life," said the woman, "verily, I deem thee a man of limited information and degenerate wit. But hearken unto my words, and I will enlighten thee concerning the topic of our discourse, that ignorance may excuse thee no further. Know, then, that the delicacies of the

Franks are of many kinds, arranged in boxes that are tied with silver cords. And the chief of them all is a thing of two natures, cunningly blended, whereof one nature appertaineth to the outer shell, and the other to the inner substance. The outer shell tasteth bitter, and the colour is of the second degree of blackness, like unto the skin of the Ethiopian eunuch. The inner substance is sweeter than the honeycomb, and white as the wool of Helbon, interspersed with all manner of nuts. This is the chief among the delicacies of the Franks; and such is the marvel of the blending of the natures that the palate knoweth neither the bitterness of the shell, nor the sweetness of the kernel, but a third flavour of more eminent rank, to which Allah hath appointed no name. Hie thee, therefore, O man of no excuse, and buy from them that sell."

"That for which thou askest," said Abdulla, "is utterly beneath the dignity of the enlightened to give thee. Ask for the wisdom of the ancients and thou shalt have it. Ask for the revelation of things hidden, and it shall

be accorded thee. But the delicacies of the Franks, cunningly blended as to their two natures, and arranged in boxes that are tied with silver cords, shalt thou in no wise receive."

"O raiser of false expectations," cried the lady, "and betrayer of her that has trusted thee, among all the sons of Adam there is none more utterly contemptible than thou. In the dignity of thy carriage thou appearest unto me as a thing abhorred; I like not thy wisdom; I have no fellowship with thy knowledge, and I despise the insolent shining of thy inner light."

"O woman of a light mind and a debased appetite," said Abdulla, "thy wits have gone astray, and thou babblest like one asleep, confounding the things that are not with the things that are. Abdulla, the water-seller, of whom thou speakest, is long numbered with the dead, and the waters of forgetfulness have flowed over his record. Only this day I heard afar off the last rumour which the world hath concerning him. And this was the rumour:

that, on a day, perceiving one athirst in the byways, Abdulla gave him freely three drops of water from the dregs of his water-skin, thereby earning the favour of Allah (whose name he exalted!) and the promise of Paradise. But going forth in the way he met a man having the Evil Eye; and lo, it straightway entered into the heart of Abdulla to fill his water-skin with the sweetmeats of the infidel, that he might find favour in the eyes of a frivolous woman—even one such as thou art. And God (than whom there is no other!), being angered at the folly of Abdulla, made a hole in the skin, and sent forth the Terminator of Delights to end his days. So the water-seller died, and the weight of his water-skin, laden with sweetmeats, went forth with his soul. And this, being heavy, dragged him down to the place of darkness, where the sweetmeats fell out through the hole in the skin and were eaten of devils."

At this the woman banged-to the lattice and disappeared.

Abdulla started at the sound of the closing lattice. He was in a standing posture on the roof of his house. The mat on which he slept was tossed into a heap, and the empty water-skin, which served him for a pillow, had been thrown some yards from its place. Abdulla looked over the parapet eastwards; and he saw the desert rose-red in the dawn.

For a long time Abdulla walked to and fro on the roof of his house pondering the things that had happened to him both in the day and the night. To piece the story together was no easy matter, for there were gaps in his memory, and, though some of the incidents were clear, others were perplexingly dim. Moreover, the incidents that were clear seemed to change places with those that were dim, so that the line between his dreams and his waking experiences was now in one place and now in another. He could not be sure, for example, that the fraying of his water-skin belonged to the one class rather than the other, and so rapid was the transition from conviction to doubt that he examined the

skin no less than five times to satisfy himself the hole was there.

The longer he meditated on these things the greater became his confusion of mind, and by the time the sun was fully risen from the desert he was well-nigh distracted and beginning to doubt of his own identity. In vain did he repeat the Seven Exorcisms, the Four Prayers, the Tecbir, the Adan, and the Two Professions of Faith, calling on the name of Allah between the exercises, and extolling His majesty every time. At last Abdulla began to wring his hands and to cry aloud like one bereft of intelligence.

While thus lamenting, it suddenly seemed to him that one from a far distance was calling him by name. Checking his cries, he listened. The voice came nearer and nearer, and presently broke out in familiar tones at his very side.

"What aileth thee, O Abdulla?" said the voice. "Hast thou partaken of the intoxicating drug? Has the Evil Eye encountered thee? Or sufferest thou from a visitation of God?"

"O my mother," answered Abdulla, "there is none else besides thee under heaven who can ease my pain and give me counsel in my perplexity. The sound of thy voice is to me like running waters to him that perisheth of thirst. Know that a great bewilderment has overtaken me, so that I discern no more the things that are not from the things that are."

"That which was foreordained has come to pass," said the woman. "Thou wast marked on thy forehead in the hour of thy birth; and I saw it, and knew that things hidden from the foundation of the earth would be revealed unto thee. Lo, the mark is on thy forehead still. O Abdulla, my son, thou art no longer a seller of water, but a seer of the Inner Substance, and divulger of secrets."

"O my mother," said Abdulla, "I know not what thou sayest. The Inner Substance is a thing whereof I have never heard, and there is no secret that I can divulge. Only a dream of the night season has troubled me, and even now it seemeth to mingle with the

things that God makes visible, so that the desert floats like a yellow cloud, and thine own form undulates before me like the morning mist."

"Thy confusion," said the woman, "is caused by the intermingling of the worlds, which few among the sons of men are permitted to note; and the undulations that bewilder thee are made by the river of Time. What thou seest is the passing of that which was into that which is, and of that which is into that which is to be. But rouse thy mind quickly, O my son, and betake thyself on the instant to a skilful Interpreter of Dreams, that the matter be resolved."

"I hear and obey," said Abdulla; and he ran down the steps of his house into the street.

As he passed through the door, Selim the courier called to him from the other side.

"O thou that dwellest alone," cried Selim, "hast thou taken to thyself a wife? Has Zobeida proved gracious?"

"Nay, verily," answered Abdulla. "I have broken a vow and Zobeida rejecteth me utterly.

And know, O Selim, that I am a man sore troubled with dreams in the night season, so that a spirit of amazement hath possessed me, and I discern not the light from the darkness, nor the shadow from the substance."

"Thou tellest a strange thing," said Selim. "Nevertheless, I heard thee speaking scarce a moment gone with one on the roof."

"My mother was come from the lower parts of the house to comfort me," said Abdulla, "and it was with her that I spake."

"Verily, thou art bewitched," answered the other. "More than twenty years have passed since thy mother entered into the Mercy of God, and her body is dust within the tomb."

Abdulla's answer was a piteous cry. He leaned for support against the wall of his house, spreading out his hands like one who would save himself from falling.

"O Selim," he cried, "I am encompassed with forgetfulness, and my heart is eradicated within me. Said I not unto thee that I discern no more between the darkness and the light, between the shadow and the substance? But

I swear to thee, by the beard of the Prophet, that she with whom I spake was the mother who bore me. She stretched out her arms towards me and touched the mark on my forehead, and bade me hasten to the Interpreter of Dreams that the matter might be resolved."

"It is a sign from Allah," said Selim; "and I doubt not that thou wilt die the death at the hand of the infidel and be received into Paradise. For know that thou hast been called two days ago, and the sergeant is even now seeking for thee."

"That also I had forgotten," said Abdulla. "I will hasten forthwith to the Interpreter of Dreams, and thereafter I will report me to the sergeant. And the rest shall be as Allah willeth."

And Abdulla passed on his way to the Interpreter of Dreams.

Suddenly he realised that his path was blocked by a crowd, and looking up he saw above him, on the other side of the street, the lattice of Zobeida. "Verily," he thought, "I

have made a long circuit; for this house lieth not in the way."

Loud cries were coming from the house, mingled with curses and the sound of hands beaten against the wall. As soon as Abdulla appeared, one of the crowd called out towards the lattice:

"O woman that cursest in the darkness, come now to the light, that we may hear thy maledictions more plainly, and be refreshed by the beauty of thy countenance. Lo, he who is thy enemy passeth even now beneath the window. Come forth, then, and the sight of him shall be as a fire in thy bones, inspiring thy tongue to the invention of disastrous epithets and calamitous imprecations. And we, on our part, will hold him fast, even the accursed Abdulla, that he run not away till his destiny is pronounced and his doom completed."

At this the lattice was burst open, and Zobeida, tearing aside her veil, displayed a countenance of wrath. Her hair was dishevelled, her cheeks were soiled with ashes and tears, her eyes were like coals of fire, and

her voice hissed and rang like the sword of a slayer in the day of battle.

"O Abdulla," she cried, "of a truth thou art the Emperor of liars and the Sultan of rogues. May the Abaser of Pride rub thy nose in the dust!"

"O my mistress," answered Abdulla, "impose upon thyself, I beseech thee, the obligation of good manners."

"Dog and son of a dog——" cried Zobeida. But Abdulla heard no more. A distant confusion of sounds had arisen. It drew nearer with amazing rapidity, and finally broke forth into the tramp of marching feet, the rumbling of wheels, and the booming of a drum. The houses melted away, the sound of Zobeida's voice grew fainter and fainter, and the knot of bystanders was gone.

Abdulla sprang to attention and looked about him. He was in the main street of the city, and opposite was the house of the Interpreter of Dreams. Coming down the street was a regiment of Turkish infantry, with a battery of guns following behind.

And a dim memory passed, like a swift shadow, over the mind of Abdulla.

For an instant he was bemused, and one who passed by heard him muttering broken words. "The long way round," he murmured; "the lattice of Zobeida—a caravan of camels laden with sweetmeats—dog and the son of a dog." Then a wind passed over his face, and it seemed to him that he had been thinking foolishly. "Well for me," he replied, "that I went not round by the house of Zobeida. For the time is short and I too am called." And with that he crossed over, making haste that he might reach the other side before the marching column blocked the street.

The house of the Interpreter was built after the European fashion, and on the door was a large brass knocker after the manner of the Franks. Abdulla stretched forth his hand, and was about to raise the knocker when one plucked him by the sleeve. Turning round he saw a man in the uniform of an officer of artillery.

'Wherefore hast thou not reported thyself?' said the officer. "Thy name was called

two days ago, and verily thou runnest a risk of being shot."

"O my master, a bewilderment hath overtaken me," said Abdulla, "so that I forget all things and know not the day from the night. Lo, even now, I seek the Interpreter of Dreams that the matter may be resolved."

"Thou art in a way to have thy dreams interpreted by a bullet through the brain," said the officer. "Leave then thy dreaming and hold thy peace; or, by Allah, I will proclaim thy cowardice forthwith and order thy arrest. Fall in!"

Abdulla had no choice. A moment later he was marching in step with a squad of reservists who followed in the rear of the guns.

As the column passed down the street a veiled woman stepped out from the edge of the crowd, and, taking three paces by the side of Abdulla, whispered in his ear:

"Play the man."

They were now at the station, entraining for the seat of war. The carriages were

crowded with shouting soldiery, and many, unable to find room within, had clambered on the roofs. Among these was Abdulla, crouching silent.

Suddenly a man in European costume forced his way along the platform and called him by name.

"Art thou Abdulla, the water-seller of Damascus?" said the man.

"I am he."

"Come down, then, that I may speak with thee. And hasten, for the time is short."

"Stay thou behind and let these go," said the European, when Abdulla had descended from the roof. "I will purchase thy release from the Pasha. Nay, the matter is already arranged, and none of these will hinder thee if thou stayest."

"And wherefore should I do this?" asked Abdulla.

"For a weighty and good reason," said the European. "Know that the fame of thee has reached to London, to Paris, to New York.

Thou art spoken of as one who hath a power upon thee which may aid in opening up the things that have been hidden from the foundation of the earth. And the probers of secrets have sent me that I may search thee out, and engage thee at a great salary, and take thee with me to the seats of the learned and the cities of the West."

"Thou art in error," said Abdulla, "for power such as thou speakest of belongeth not to me. Of a truth, I am one who walketh in a great bewilderment, and the spirit of forgetfulness hath overpowered me. But withal I am a common man, of whom Allah hath created millions, and it was but yesterday I was seeking the Interpreter of Dreams, that I might pay him the fee and have the matter resolved."

"I am the Interpreter of Dreams whom thou soughtest," said the other, "and I dwell in the house built in the European fashion, with the great knocker of brass, after the manner of the Franks."

"Thy name?" said Abdulla.

"My name is Professor ——"—but an

escape of steam from the panting locomotive drowned the next word,—"and I am come from London to fetch thee."

"I go not with thee," said Abdulla, "for thou seemest to be one whom the Deluder of Intelligence is leading astray. I have but dreams to tell thee; and if thou wantest dreams, hast thou none of thine own? Verily, a dream is but a little thing."

"Thou errest," shouted the other — for Abdulla had now climbed back on to the roof, —"a dream is a thing more wonderful than aught else the Creator hath appointed, and there is none among the sons of Adam who understandeth the coming and the going thereof. But if thou wilt come with me——"

The Interpreter broke off in the middle of his sentence, for the train was moving out of the station, and he saw that Abdulla could no longer hear the words.

The battery to which Abdulla was attached lay in a hollow to the rear of the main battle, awaiting orders to take up a position in the

front. It was the first time he had been under fire. Dead bodies, horridly mangled, lay around, and a straggling throng of wounded men, some silent, some unmanned by agony, and all terrible to look upon, was passing by. As Abdulla saw these things, the fear of death grew strong within him. His body trembled and his face was blanched.

Seeing his state his companions began to deride him. Presently a gaily dressed officer, passing where he was, paused in front of him, and drawing a small mirror from his pocket held it in front of the trembling man, and said:

"Look in this, O Abdulla, and thou wilt see the face of a coward."

Abdulla looked in the mirror and saw there the very face which had confronted him not long ago in the shop window of the Greek.

The soldiers around him burst into a roar of laughter as Abdulla looked in the mirror; but he heard them not.

He was busy in inward colloquy. "O thou that tremblest in thy body," he was saying to himself, "O Abdulla the coward, hearken

unto me. Behold yon rider coming swiftly, and know, O thou craven carcase, that he bringeth the order to advance. Thinkest thou to stay behind, and then run away stealthily, and get thee back to thy water-selling in Damascus and to thy dallyings with a woman? Yea, verily, thou thinkest it; and even now contrivest within thyself how thou mayest steal away and not be seen. But know thou that I who speak to thee will suffer not thy cowardice. I will force thee presently to carry thy trembling limbs to yonder line, whence come these whom thou seest in their pain. Thither will I take thee, and I will hold thee fast in a place where death cometh to four of every five. Not a step backward shalt thou go. Nay, rather, I will blow a flame through thy nostrils into the marrow of thy bones, driving thee forward, until I have thee firm in the very hottest of the fire. See, the signal rises! Hark, the trumpet sounds! Up then, thou quaking carrion, for thy hour is come.—Well done! Those behind thee are taking note that thou tremblest no

more! By Allah, I have conquered thee and have thee utterly in my power!"

Every man was in his place. Abdulla, firm and ready, the rebuking voice now silent within him, sat on the leading gun-horse; the traces that bound it to the gun were already taut, and the whip-hand of the driver was aloft in air. The word is given, the whips descend, and the whole thundering train of men and beasts, with Abdulla at its head, sweeps forward to the place of sacrifice.

The battle was lost, and the long ridge on which Abdulla's battery had been posted was carpeted with dead and dying men. A pall of yellow smoke, broken from moment to moment by the flashes of exploding shrapnel, hung over the ridge, and a blazing house immediately behind the position shed a copper-coloured glare over the appalling scene. A cold and cursed rain was falling, and stricken men, in extremities of thirst, were lapping pools of water defiled with their own blood.

Of the twelve guns that formed the battery,

all were dismantled save one, and by this there stood a solitary man, the only upright figure from end to end of the ridge. It was Abdulla. For five hours he had done his duty untouched by shot, shell, or bayonet. He had continued the service of his gun till the last round of ammunition was expended; and when a cry arose among the survivors that they should save themselves, he had watched the last stragglers depart and refused to stir from his post. And now he stood inactive and motionless, alone in a copper-coloured wilderness of agony and death.

Twice the enemy had attempted by desperate charges to storm the hill, and, save for the lull in the artillery fire which preceded these attacks, the work of death had hardly ceased for a moment. Even now it still went on, slaying those who were half slain. Unable to see clearly the state of things on the ridge, or behind it, and unaware that the defence was totally annihilated, the enemy had hardly slackened his fire. Scores of shrapnel were bursting overhead, and the singing of

the rifle bullets was like the hum of bees in swarming time. As the shells exploded and the pitiless missiles came thrashing down, Abdulla noticed how, after each explosion, some portion of the human carpet would toss and undulate for a moment, as though the wind had got under it, and then subside again into its place. The numbness and exhaustion of other faculties had liberated his powers of observation, and at that moment they were abnormally acute.

Fear, even the memory of fear, had long departed, and of mental distress there was none, save a sense of immobility and powerlessness, such as a man may have in an ugly dream. Abdulla leaned on the wheel of the gun-carriage, gazing on the scene around him as a spectacle to be studied; and he watched the shells bursting overhead with no more concern than he would have felt for a passing flight of birds. He was aware of his utter loneliness, and now and then a slight stir of self-compassion would ripple the lucid depths of his consciousness. With a certain repug-

nance, also, he noticed the copper-coloured light, which shed its glare in every direction as far as he could see.

The tensest hours of his life, during which he had exerted his body with furious energy, and his senses had been incessantly assailed with every kind of shock, had ended in a feeling, amounting almost to conviction, that the events in which he had participated, the deeds he had done, and the spectacle now before him were the tissue of a dream.

Blustering facts that bludgeon and bombard the senses, often provoke us, by the very violence of their self-announcement, to suspect them as illusory. Reality is a low-voiced, soft-footed thing; a mean between two extremes, clothed at all times in the garments of modesty and reserve, which neither strives nor cries nor lifts up its voice in the streets. But when the gods are drunk and the heavens in uproar, and the thing called "fact" is unrestrained, ranting and storming about the stage like an ill-mannered actor—then it is that the cup begins to pass away from us, and

a still small voice whispers within that the whole performance is a masquerade.

Thus had it happened to Abdulla. Dreamer as he was, he had never yet been able to detect himself in the act of dreaming. But now the waking state was over-wakeful, and at the very moment when each nerve in his body was strung to utmost tension, and the sense organs in full commission, and fact in its most brutal form thundering on the gates of his mind, there came to him a calm that was more than vacancy, a conviction that he was in the land of dreams, and a peaceful foreshadowing that he would soon awake.

"And yet," he thought, "it is weary work, this waiting for the spell to break. Ha, that one would have done it, had I stood a span further to the left! Why cannot they wake me? Are not a hundred pieces of artillery sufficient to rouse one solitary man from his dreams? Stay! What if I am wakened already? And what if this be hell? If so, is it so much worse than earth? But please Allah that I stand not thus for all eternity, waiting for the

dream to pass. Ah! I was hit that time"—and he put his hand to the region of his heart. "A mere graze. Perhaps the next will do better. Allah send me a thing to do! Ho, thou Selim! Hast thou life in thee to stand upright and do a thing? I saw thee raise thyself a moment ago. If thou hast strength, bestir thyself a little, and thou and I will find another round, and fire a last shot before we pass."

Selim the courier was lying behind the gun with a dozen others, dead or wounded to death. Abdulla had hardly finished speaking when a shrapnel burst over the heap, and Selim, who had been lying face downward on the top, flung himself round in the last agony. As the bullets struck, the whole heap seemed to disperse, the bodies spreading outward into a ring with a hollow space in the midst.

Then Abdulla saw a thing that caused his heart to leap for joy. Lying in the hollow made by the dispersion of the bodies was a round of ammunition which some man had been carrying at the moment he was

stricken down, and which had hitherto been covered up by the dead. At the sight of it, a sudden inspiration fell like a thunderbolt upon Abdulla's dream. The sense of immobility was gone. "By Allah, thou art alive and awake!" he cried, addressing himself. "Quick, thou slave of a body! Thou hast yet strength in thee to open the breech-piece of the gun, and the cartridge is not so heavy but that these arms can lift it. Up, then, and act!"

He sprang forward. Quick as thought he seized the cartridge and carried his burden back to the gun.

Then he stretched forth his hand to grasp the lever which controlled the mechanism of the breech. But before his fingers closed on the metal he paused for the briefest instant to look around him. In one glance he took in the whole scene in all its extent and detail —the long ridge under the copper-coloured light, the carpet of moaning or silent forms, the dead body of Selim, the dismantled guns, the valley below, the enemy's position on the further side, and the red spurts of flame from

his artillery. He noted also that the rain had ceased and the setting sun had broken through the cloud.

Then, on a sudden, the vast view seemed to fall away into an immeasurable distance, and, as a landscape contracts when seen from the wrong end of the telescope, drew inwards from its edges with incredible rapidity until it occupied no more space than is enclosed by the circumference of the smallest coin. And in the same flash of time it was gone altogether.

As it went, Abdulla felt his fingers close on the cold metal.

They closed on the metal, and Abdulla saw without the least surprise that the thing he held in his hand was the knocker of brass on the door of the Interpreter of Dreams.

He knew no shock, asked himself no questions, perceived no breach of continuity. He lifted the knocker, and its fall sounded in the street of Damascus at the very instant that the boom of the bursting shell, which had blown

the water-seller to fragments, was reverberating over Tchatalja.

Abdulla knocked. As he waited for the door to open he looked up and down the street. He had arrived in Damascus overnight, and his surroundings were yet strange to him. Nevertheless, as he continued to look at the houses and the passers-by, a suspicion crossed his mind that he had been in this place before. "Perhaps I have dreamed of such a place," he thought. "But surely the face of yonder man is familiar. Where did I see one like him? In Paris? In London? Ho thou, with the courier's badge on thine arm! A word with thee."

The man paused at the doorstep, and Abdulla looked him full in the face. Instantly his mind became confused, his tongue began to stammer, and he heard himself speaking of he knew not what. "Hast thou life in thee?" he said. "If so, bestir thyself and thou and I——" But the words broke off, and Abdulla stood mouthing.

"Thou babblest like one intoxicated," said

the man. "May Allah preserve thy wits!" And he passed on.

The door opened, and Abdulla's mind became clear. A moment later he stood in the presence of the Interpreter of Dreams.

"Who art thou?" said the Interpreter, "and what is the occasion of thy coming?"

"I am a Cairene," said Abdulla, "born of Syrian parentage in this city, but taken hence when I was an infant of five years. I am come to Damascus for a purpose which thou and I have in common. I, too, am a student of dreams."

"Of which kind?" asked the Interpreter. "For know that dreams are of two kinds: dreams of the worlds that were, and dreams of the worlds that are to be. Of which hast thou knowledge?"

"Of a world that was," said Abdulla.

"Thou hast chosen a thankless study," answered the other. "Few will trust thy discoveries. For a thousand who will believe thee if thou teachest of a world that is to be, there is scarce one who will listen if thou

speakest of a world that was. But tell me thy history, and name thy qualifications."

"I have been educated in the Universities of the West," said Abdulla, "and there I sat at the feet of one who taught me a doctrine which he had learnt from a master of the ancient time. And the doctrine was this: that worlds without end lie enfolded one within the other like the petals of a rose; and the next world after differs from the next world before no more than a full water-skin differs from itself when two drops of water have fallen from its mouth. 'The world,' taught the master, 'is a memory and a dream, and at every stage of its existence it beholds the image of its past and the fainter image of its future reflected as in a glass.'"

"And why makest thou the world that was before of more account than the world that comes after?"

"I said not that I made it of more account," answered Abdulla, "but that my knowledge was of this rather than of that. But know that I am a dreamer of dreams, and it is the

world before that my dreams have revealed to me."

"Tell me thy dreams."

"It is of them that I came to speak with thee. There is one dream that ever recurreth both in the day and the night. Seventy times seven have I seen a frayed water-skin, having a hole in a certain part, no larger than an olive-stone."

"That is a small matter," said the Interpreter, "and such things concern us not. But I suspect that thou art not at the end of thy story. For, verily, thou hast not travelled from the cities of the West to speak of a thing so slight. Say, therefore, what has brought thee to Damascus."

"That also I would tell thee; for it is a matter to be pondered. Thou art of the wise, and knowest, therefore, that there is a virtue in places and a power in localities. In one, the light of the soul is extinguished; in another, it is kindled; in one, the reason dies; in another, the half-thought becomes a whole, and the doctrine that is dimly apprehended

becomes clear. Now, being in the city of Paris, I conversed with one of the French who had visited the holy places of his religion, where he had meditated in solitude and seen visions and dreamed dreams; and I told him that I had a doctrine newly born, half grown. 'O Abdulla,' he said, 'there is a virtue in places and a power in localities. Go thou, therefore, to the city of Damascus, for that is a place where, in days that are gone, the half-thought became a whole, and the doctrine dimly apprehended became clear. Put thyself on the way to Damascus and await the issue.'"

At these words the Interpreter rose from his seat and paced the room in thought.

"The man of whom thou speakest," he said at length, "is known to me; and many are they whom he has guided to this place. Rightly sayest thou that there is a virtue in places and a power in localities. And here the power still lingers which the world lost when mankind took to babbling. Thy reason for coming hither is mine also. Seest thou not that

I have made my dwelling in the Street that is called Straight?"

"I see and understand," said Abdulla.

There was another pause, and again the Interpreter paced the room. Then he resumed:

"Between thee and me there is need of little speech to attain a comprehension, and the short sentence meaneth more than the long explanation. Nevertheless, I would fain hear the rest of thy story. Proceed then, and tell me of the dreams that came to thee on the way to Damascus."

"On the way itself," said Abdulla, "there came no dreams. But this very day I sat by the bank of the river, full of thought, and methinks sleep overpowered me — though I know not. And there came a poor man carrying a water-skin, and I, looking upon him, saw that his face was like unto mine own, but marred by his toil and his poverty. And the man sat himself down, leaning against a palm-tree on the side away from the sun, and slept. Then I arose and stood before him, and expounded to him my

doctrine, and he seemed as one that saw and heard, though asleep. And when his eyes were opened he saw me no more, but took up his water-skin and filled it at the river, making mention of the name of God.

"I followed him into the city, and saw one thrust him against the wall so that his water-skin was frayed. Thereafter the water-skin burst, and a hole appeared in a certain part the size of an olive-stone, and the remnant of the water flowed forth. But, passing a certain street, a woman called to him to give her little ones to drink. And I, being hard by, and seeming to know the woman, whispered to the man that he should pass his hands craftily over the skin, if peradventure a drop remained to moisten the lips of them that cried out for the thirst. But none remained, and the man went on his way sorrowing.

"Then I lost him for a while; but as night fell I found him again, standing in front of a glass window and meditating a thing that was dishonest. And the man looking through the window saw me standing among the goods

that were in the shop. Whereupon he changed his design and ran away.

"I wandered through the streets of the city, and passing by a certain house, a frivolous woman looked out from a lattice and reviled me. I understood not the things that she spake, and having answered the woman I departed. Then I bethought me that she had taken me for another, and, remembering that the face of the water-seller was like unto mine own, I surmised that it was he.

"Suddenly, I know not how, I found myself in a place of battle, armed like the rest, and, turning aside, I saw, standing among the harnessed horses of a gun-team, the man whose water-selling I had watched in the city. And the spirit of fear was upon him; his countenance was blanched and his body all aquake; and I, ashamed that one who bore my own semblance should stand disgraced among his fellows, rebuked him for his cowardice; and methought I blew a fire through his nostrils into the marrow of his bones. Then the man took courage and, mounting his horse with

alacrity, went forward with the bravest to the place of death.

"Thereafter I saw him no more. But this very hour, even as I lifted thy knocker of brass, a great light shone round about me, a sound of thunder shook the air, and a voice said, 'Lo! thy broken water-skin is mended and full of water. Go forth, therefore, and give to them that are athirst.' Whereupon it seemed to me that the half-thought became a whole, and the doctrine that was dimly apprehended grew clear. And now I am a man prepared to go forward, even as he was into whom I blew the breath of courage on the field of death. A thing that was holding me back is gone from me, and lo! I am free."

"Perchance one has ministered unto thee, even as thou didst minister to that other in the hour when he was afraid," said the Interpreter.

"That may be," said Abdulla. "But did I not tell thee that as yet I have no knowledge of the world that will be?"

"The knowledge awaits thee, and will begin from this hour," said the Interpreter.

"Most assuredly that which thou tellest is an image of the world that was; and he that dreameth of the one world dreameth also in due season of the other. But hearken now while I put thee to the question; and if thou answerest according to thy doctrine, peradventure the interpretation of thy vision will appear in the issue."

"Say on," said Abdulla.

"This, then, is the question. Thinkest thou, O Dreamer, that when a man dies and enters Paradise, he knows of his condition, as who should say, 'Lo, I am now a disembodied spirit, having just passed through the article of death, and these before me are the Gates of Heaven, and yonder shining thing is the Throne of God?'"

"Nay, verily," said Abdulla, "in this and in every world the Throne of God is revealed after one and the same manner, and never shall it be seen in any world save by such as follow there the Loyal Path whereby it is found in this. And he who beholdeth not the Gates of Paradise in the world where he is, will look

for them in vain in the world where he is to be."

"Art thou willing to think, then, that thou and I are in Paradise even at this hour?"

"Thou hintest at the doctrine that has been revealed to me," said the other. "It may be even as thou sayest. For certain am I that thou and I have died many deaths; and as there is another world in respect of this, so is this world another in respect of them that went before. Great is the error which deemeth that the number of the worlds is but two, and that death, therefore, cometh once only to a man, when he passeth from the first to the second. Of death, as of life, the kinds are innumerable; and of these, that which destroyeth the body at the end is only one, and perhaps not the chief. Whatsoever changeth into its contrary must needs die in the act; so that except one die, grief cannot pass into joy, nor darkness into light, nor evil into good; neither can the lost be found, nor the sleeper awake. Wherefore it may be that thou and I are in Paradise even now."

"Thou speakest to the question," said the Interpreter. "Some there are, as thou sayest, who, being in Paradise already, will still be asking whether Paradise awaits them. And if the enlightened go thus astray, how much deeper is the ignorance of the darkened! For in no place, O Abdulla, is Hell more doubted of than in Hell itself."

"I have lived in the cities of the West and have observed that very thing," said Abdulla. "Many a damned soul have I heard making boast of his good estate, and many a doubt of Judgment shouted forth from the very flames of the Pit. For how shall a man know when he is now dead and come to Judgment? Doth he live in his dying, and, taking note of his last breath, say within himself, 'Lo, now I am dead'? And if he know not the single occasion of his dying, how should he remember even though death worketh upon him daily and passeth over him a thousand times?"

"Death and forgetting are one," said the Interpreter, "and the memory of dying

perisheth like a dream. But some there are to whom Allah hath appointed a station at the place of passage and set as watchmen at the intermingling of the worlds. These pass to and fro over the bridges, gathering tidings from forgotten realms; and much of majesty and worth that escapeth the common sort is apparent unto them. And of such, O Abdulla, thy dreams declare thee to be one."

"Hast thou no further interpretation?" asked Abdulla.

"Hark!" said the other. "The full interpretation cometh even now."

And, as he spoke, the brass knocker sounded on the door.

Thus endeth "The Hole in the Water-skin."

III

DR PIECRAFT CLEARS HIS MIND

THROUGHOUT the whole of this long prelection Dr Phippeny Piecraft had scarcely moved a muscle, listening with ever deeper attention as the story went on. Once only had he interrupted the reader.

"You are coming now," he had said, "to the deleted passage about Dual Personality. Don't forget to read it."

"Pardon me," said the young man, "I passed that point some minutes since. The writer had pencilled against the passage, '*Omit, spoils the unity.*' So, from respect to his wishes, I left it out."

"It was well done," Piecraft had answered. "Unity is all-important. Proceed."

And now, the reading being over, the two

men sat for several minutes facing one another in silence. Presently the reader said:

"Well, have you identified the author?"

"I have," said Piecraft. "The tale is a reminiscence of some old speculations of mine. I wrote every word of it myself, and I finished it last night."

"How came you to think that it was written by somebody else?"

"That is what puzzles me. But I can give a partial explanation. Last night, after finishing the tale, I had a dream, which was extremely vivid, though I find it impossible now to recall the details. I dreamt that I was writing a story under the title of *Dual Personality*—something about a gamekeeper and two young lords who interchanged their characters. It was a sort of nightmare, partly accounted for by the fact that my health, until to-day, has been indifferent. When you came in this morning the influence of the dream lingered in sufficient strength to make me think I had actually written the story dreamed about, and not

the one you have just read out. It was an illusion."

"Illusion is an integral part of reality," said the young man.

"Is that an original remark?" asked Piecraft. "Somehow I seem to remember having heard it before."

"It is a quotation," answered the other. "I am in the habit of using it for the enlightenment of new-comers."

"New-comers!" exclaimed Piecraft. "My dear fellow, do you know that my brass plate has been on this house for over ten years. It is you who are the new-comer, not I."

The young man smiled. "It has been on this house much longer than that, but you are a new-comer all the same," said he.

"I don't catch your drift," said Piecraft. "What do you mean?"

"It takes time to answer that," said the other. "Be content to learn gradually."

"There's something strange about all this," said Piecraft, "which I should like to clear up at once. I don't seem to know exactly where

I am. Do you mind shaking me? For I'm half inclined to think that I'm fast asleep and dreaming—like Abdulla, in the story."

"You were never so wide-awake in your life. But if you wish for an immediate enlightenment, I can take you to a house in the next street, when the whole position will be cleared up at once."

"Come along," said Piecraft. "I feel like a man who is in for a big adventure. There's something interesting in this."

As they passed down the street, Piecraft said: "Would you mind telling me as we walk along what you think of the story you read just now? It's not in my usual style; in fact, it's quite a new departure, and I'm very anxious, before publishing, to know what impression it makes on good judges."

"The story is not bad for a first attempt," said the young man. "You'll learn to express yourself better later on. It was a bold thing on your part to tackle that subject right away. To handle it properly requires much more experience than you have had. There are

one or two points which you have presented in a false light, and you have mixed some things up which ought to have been kept separate. But, on the whole, you have no reason to be discouraged."

"I'm surprised at what you say," returned Piecraft. "As to my being a beginner, I had a notion that I was a novelist of standing, as well as a Gold Medallist in Cerebral Pathology. But just now I'm not going to dogmatise about that or anything else. It's just possible that I'm still under the illusion produced by the dream of last night. Meanwhile, I'm really anxious to know what has happened. The things about me are familiar—and yet somehow not the same as I remember them. They look as though the old dirt had been washed out of them."

"You are getting on remarkably well," said his companion. "The whole world has been spring-cleaned since you saw it last."

"You have an original way of expressing yourself," said Piecraft. "Your style reminds me of a young half-brother of mine. He was

lost in a steamer whose name I can't remember —when was it? His conversation was always picturesque. And, by the way, that suggests another thing. The young girl who waited on me, this morning—who is she?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because she's so uncommonly like a girl I used to run after in the old days—a student at the Slade School of Art. And a wonderfully good, nice girl she was. Her father, who was said to be a scoundrel, got ten years for alleged embezzlement; and the girl gave me up because I wouldn't take his side. How she stuck to him through thick and thin! I tell you, my boy, she was a loyal soul! I wonder if she is still alive."

"Such souls are hard to kill," said the other.

By this time the pair had arrived at the house indicated by the messenger. On the door of it was an enormous knocker of brass.

"Knock, and it shall be opened," said the young man.

Dr Piecraft had lifted the knocker and was

about to let it fall when he heard his name called loudly down the street and saw a man running towards him with a piece of paper in his hand. The man approached and Piecraft, taking the paper, read as follows:

"*Dr Phippeny Piecraft is needed at once for a matter of life and death.*"

"I must be off immediately," he said to his companion; "I am called to an urgent case. It's a matter of life and death. Duty first, my boy, and the clearing-up of mysteries afterwards! Remember what the sergeant said to Abdulla when he plucked him by the sleeve. Besides—who knows?—this may mean that the practice is going to revive."

"That is precisely what it does mean," said the young man. "Matters of life and death are extremely common just now, and you are the very man to deal with them."

"How do you know that?" said Piecraft with some astonishment; and, as he spoke the words, without thinking he released the lifted knocker from his hand.

The knocker fell, and the instant it struck

the door Dr Phippeny Piecraft knew where he was.

"*It's wonderfully like the old home,*" he said.

A familiar laugh sounded behind him.

He turned round; and the man who grasped his hand was Jim.

THE PROFESSOR'S MARE

I

THE REVEREND JOHN SCATTERGOOD, D.D., Professor of Systematic Theology, was of Puritan descent. The founder of the family was Caleb Scatter-the-good-seed, a cornet of horse in Cromwell's army, who had earned his master's favour by prowess at the battle of Dunbar. The family tradition averred that when Cromwell halted the pursuit of Leslie's shattered forces for the purpose of singing the 117th Psalm, it was Caleb Scatter-the-good-seed who gave out the tune and led the psalmody. This he did at the beginning of every verse by striking a tuning-fork on his bloody sword. He was mounted, said the tradition, on a coal-black horse.

John Scattergood, D.D., was a hard-headed

theologian. His lectures on Systematic Theology ended, as all who attended them will remember, in a cogent demonstration of the Friendliness of the Universe, firmly established by the Inflexible Method. This was a masterpiece of ratiocination. The impartial observation of facts, the even-handed weighing of evidence, the right ordering of principles and their application, the separation and weaving together of lines of thought, the careful disentangling of necessary pre-suppositions, the just treatment of objectors—all the qualities demanded of one who handles the deepest problems of thought were combined in Dr Scattergood's demonstration of the Friendliness of the Universe according to the Inflexible Method. Most of his hearers were convinced by his arguments, and went forth into the world to publish the good news that the Universe was friendly.

Hard-headed as Scattergood was, it would be unjust to his character to describe him as free from superstition. Much of his life, indeed, had been spent in attacking the super-

stitions of the ignorant and the thoughtless; but this very practice had bred in him, as in so many others, a superstitious regard for the argumentative weapons used in the attack. Like his ancestor at Dunbar, he struck his tuning-fork on his sword. To be sure, he was a Rational Theist, and a cause of Rational Theism in others; but, unless I am much mistaken, the ultimate object of his faith, the Power behind his Deity, was the Inflexible Method. Superstition never dies; it merely changes its form. It is not a confession we make to ourselves so much as a charge we bring against others, and its greatest power is always exercised in directions where we are least aware of its existence. And Scattergood, of course, was unaware that his attitude towards the Inflexible Method was profoundly superstitious. It follows that he was unprepared for the part which superstition, changing its form, was destined to play in his life.

Theology, then, was his vocation, but I have now to add, the horse was his hobby. Although he had taken to riding late in life,

he was by no means an incapable rider or an ignorant horseman. Next to the Universe, the horse had been the subject of his profoundest study; and as he was a close reasoner in regard to the one, he was a tight rider in regard to the other. His seat, like his philosophy, was a trifle stiff; but what else could you expect in one who had passed his sixtieth year? He never rode to hounds, nor otherwise unduly jeopardised his neck; but for managing a high-spirited horse, when all the rest of us were in difficulties, I never knew his better. "Let Scattergood go first," we cried as the traction engine came snorting down the road and our elderly hacks were prancing on the pavement; and sure enough his young thoroughbred would walk by the monster without so much as changing its feet.

"Scattergood," I once asked him, "what do you *do* to that young mare of yours when you meet a traction engine or a military band?"

"Nothing," he replied.

"Then what do you *say* to her?"

"Nothing."

"Then how do you manage it?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

Needless to say, he was deeply respected in the stables. "A gen'l'man with a wonderful *'orse-sense*," said the old ostler one day, expatiating, as usual, on Scattergood's virtues. "If I'd had a 'orse-sense like him, I'd be one o' the richest men in England. If ever there was a man as throwed himself away, there he goes! 'Orse-sense isn't a thing as you see every day, sir. The only other man I've ever knowed as had it was his Lordship, as I was his coachman in Ireland more than twenty years ago. His Lordship used to say to me, 'Tom,' he says, 'Tom, it all comes of my grandfather and his father before him bein' jockeys.' And between you and me, sir, that's what's the matter with his Reverence. He's jockey-bred, sir, you take my word for it."

"His father was a bishop," I interposed.

"Well, his father may have been a bishop, for all I care," said Tom. "But what about his mother, and what about his mother's father, and his father before him, and all the

rest on 'em? When it comes to a matter o' breedin', you don't stop at fathers; you take in the whole pedigree. Wasn't his Lordship's father a brewer? And what difference did that make? When 'orse-sense once gets started in a family it takes more than brewin' and more than bishopin' to wash it out o' the blood."

"I've heard that gypsies have the same gift," I said.

"I've 'eard it too, sir. But I never would have nothing to do with gypsies; though his Lordship was as thick as thieves with 'em. And thieves are just what they are, sir, and if it weren't for that I'd say as the gen'l'man was as like to be gypsy-bred as jockey. Don't you never let the gypsies sell *you* a 'oss, sir; you'll be took in if you do. But they couldn't gypsy *him*! Why, I don't believe as there's a 'oss-dealer for twenty miles round as wouldn't go out for a walk if he 'eard as Dr Scattergood was comin' to buy a 'oss."

That the ostler's last remark was true in the spirit if not in the letter the following incident

seems to prove. Once I was myself entrapped into the folly of buying a horse, and I was on the point of concluding the bargain, which seemed to be all in my favour, when a friendly daimon whispered in my ear that I had better be cautious. So I said, "Yes, the horse seems all right. But before coming to a final decision, I'll bring Dr Scattergood round to have a look at him." And the dealer presently abated his price by twenty pounds, on the understanding that "that there interferin' Scattergood, as had already done him more bad turns than one, was not allowed to poke his nose into business which was none of his."

"Pretty good," said the Professor when I showed him my purchase. "Pretty good. But I think I could have saved you another ten pounds, had you taken the trouble to consult me."

He kept but one horse, and it was observed, as a strange thing in a lover of horses, that he never kept that one for long. He was constantly changing his mount. By superficial observers this was set down to a certain fickle-

ness of disposition; but the truth seems rather to have been that Scattergood, consciously or unconsciously, was engaged in the quest for the Perfect Horse. No man knew better than he what equine perfection involved, and none was ever more painfully sensitive to the slightest deviation from the Absolute Ideal. Whatever good qualities his horse might possess—and they were always numerous—the presence of a single fault, however slight, would haunt and oppress him in much the same way as a venial sin will trouble the consciousness of a saint. I remember one beautiful animal in which the severest judges could find no defect save that it had half a dozen miscoloured hairs hidden away on one of its hind-legs. Every time the good doctor rode that horse he saw the miscoloured hairs through the back of his head; and away went the beast to Tattersall's after a week's trial. Another followed, and another after that; but we soon ceased to count them, and took it for granted that Scattergood's horse, seen once, would not be seen again. So it went on until

in the fullness of time there appeared a horse, or more strictly a mare, which did not depart as swiftly as it came.

Whatever perfection may be in other realms, perfection in horses seems after all to be a relative thing; for though Dr Scattergood himself regarded this one as perfect, I doubt if he could have found a single soul in the wide world to agree with him. To be sure, she was beautiful enough to cause a flutter of excitement as she passed down the street; but a beast of more dangerous mettle never pranced on two feet or kicked out with one. She was the terror of every stable she entered, and it was only by continual largesse on the part of Scattergood that any groom could be induced to feed or tend her. What she cost him monthly for tips, for broken stable furniture, and for veterinary attendance on the horses she kicked in the ribs, I should be sorry to say. But Scattergood paid it all without a murmur; no infatuated lover ever bore the extravagance of his mistress with a lighter heart. For the truth of the matter was, that he was deeply

attached to this mare, and the mare was deeply attached to him.

Why the mare was fond of Scattergood is a problem requiring for its solution more horse-sense than most of us possess; so we had better leave it alone. But Scattergood's reason for being fond of the mare can be stated in a sentence. She reminded him, constantly and vividly, of Ethelberta. Her high spirits, her dash, her unexpectedness, her brilliant eyes, her gait, and especially the carriage of her head, were a far truer likeness of Ethelberta than was the faded photograph, or even the miniature set in gold, which the reverend professor kept locked in his secret drawer.

Now Ethelberta was the name of the lady whom Scattergood wished he had married. For five-and-thirty years he had never ceased wishing he had married *her*—and not someone else. Someone else! Ay, there was the rub! The lawful Mrs Scattergood was not a person whose portrait I should care to draw in much detail. Can you imagine a harder lot than that of a

world-famous Systematic Theologian, publicly pledged to maintain the Friendliness of the Universe, but privately consumed with anxiety lest on returning home (*horresco referens!*) he should find a heavy-featured, blear-eyed, irredeemable woman, the woman who called herself his wife, narcotised on the drawing-room sofa, with an empty bottle of chloral at her side? That was the lot of John Scattergood, D.D., and he bore it like a man, keeping up a pathetic show of devotion to his intolerable wife, and concealing his personal misery from the world with an ingenuity only equal to that with which he published abroad the Friendliness of the Universe. To be sure, he had long abandoned the quest for happiness as a thing unworthy of a Systematic Theologian—what else, indeed, could he do? Still, it was hardly possible to avoid reflecting that he would have been happier if he had married Ethelberta. Each day something happened to convince him that he would. For example, his first duty every morning, before settling down to work, was to make a tour of the house, some-

times in the company of a trusted domestic, hunting for a concealed bottle of morphia; and when at last the servant, with her arm under a mattress, said, "I've got it, sir," he could not help reflecting that the burden of life would have been lighter had he married the high-souled Ethelberta. And with the thought a cloud seemed to pass between John Scattergood and the sun.

He would often say to himself that he wished he could forget Ethelberta. But in point of fact he wished nothing of the kind. He secretly cherished her memory, and the efforts he made to banish her from his thoughts only served to incorporate her more completely with the atmosphere of his life.

All through life John Scattergood had been a deeply conscientious man. But conscience —or rather something that called itself conscience, but was in reality nothing of the kind, —which had served him so well in other respects, had been his undoing in the matter of Ethelberta. At the age of twenty-five he was not aware that a man's evil genius, bent

on doing its victim the deadliest turn, will often disguise itself in the robes of his heavenly guide. Later on in life he learned to penetrate these disguises, but at twenty-five he was at their mercy. He was, as we have seen, of Puritan descent; his evangelical upbringing had taught him to regard as heaven-sent all inner voices which bade him sacrifice his happiness; and this it was of which the enemy took advantage. In his relationship with Ethelberta the young man was radiantly happy; but that very circumstance aroused his suspicions. "You are not worthy of this happiness," said an inner voice; "and, what is far more to the point, you are not worthy of Ethelberta. She is too good for such as you."

"Who are you?" said the young Scattergood, addressing the inner voice. "Who are you that haunt me night and day with this horrible fear?"

"I am your conscience," answered the voice. "You are unworthy of Ethelberta; and it is I, your conscience, that tell you so. I am a

voice from heaven, and beware of disregarding me."

Had Scattergood been thirty years older, this strange anxiety on the part of his conscience to establish its claims as a voice from heaven would have put him on his guard; he would have lifted those shining robes and seen the hoofs beneath them. But these precautions had not occurred to him in the days when he and Ethelberta were walking hand in hand. So he listened to that inner voice with awe: he listened until its lying words became an obsession; until they darkened his mind; until they drowned the voices of love and began to find utterance in his manners, and even in his speech, with Ethelberta. She, on her part, did not understand—what woman ever could or would?—and a cloud came between them. "The cloud is from heaven," said the inner voice. "I have sent it; let it grow; you are not good enough for Ethelberta, and it will be a sin to link your life with hers."

So the cloud grew, till one day a woman's wrath shot out of it; there was an explosion,

a quarrel, a breach; and the two parted, never to meet again. "You have done your duty," said the false conscience. "You have dealt me a mortal hurt," said the soul. But Scattergood was still convinced that he was not good enough for Ethelberta.

Within a year or two the usual results had followed. Scattergood married a woman who was not good enough for *him*; and that other man, who had been watching his opportunity, like a wolf around the sheepfold, married Ethelberta. And he was not good enough for *her*.

And now many years had passed, and Ethelberta was long since dead. But that made no difference to the aching wound; for Professor Scattergood, who was intelligent about all things, and far too intelligent about Ethelberta, used to reflect that probably she would still be alive had she married him. "They went to Naples for their honeymoon," he would say aloud—for he was in the habit of talking to himself—"they went to Naples for their honeymoon; there she caught typhoid

fever, and died six weeks after her marriage. But things would have happened differently had she married *me*. *We* were not going to Naples for the honeymoon. We were going to Switzerland: we settled it that night after the dance at Lady Brown's—the night I first told her I was not worthy of her. Fool that I was!" Such were the meditations of Professor John Scattergood, D.D., as he trotted under the hedgerow elms and heard the patter of his horse's hoofs falling softly on the withered leaves.

Thus we can understand how it came to pass that Dr Scattergood's imagination was abnormally sensitive to anything which could remind him of Ethelberta. And I have no doubt that his peculiar horse-sense was also involved in the particular reminder with which we have now to deal.

Certain it is that he discerned the resemblance to Ethelberta the moment he cast eyes upon his mare. He was standing in the dealer's yard, and the dealer was leading the animal out of the stable. Suddenly catching sight of

the strange black-coated figure, she stopped abruptly, lowered her head, curved her neck, and looked Scattergood straight between the eyes. For a moment he was paralysed with astonishment and thought he was dreaming. The movement, the attitude, the look were all Ethelberta's! Exactly thus had she stopped abruptly, lowered her head, curved her neck, and looked him in the face when thirty-five years ago he had been introduced to her at an Embassy Ball in Vienna. A vision swept over his inner eye: he saw bright uniforms, heard music, felt the presence of a crowd; and so completely was the actuality of things blotted out that he made a low reverence to the animal as though he were being introduced to some highborn dame. The dealer noticed the movement and wondered what "new hanky-panky old Scattergood was trying on the mare."

"Now, that's a mare I raised myself," said the dealer. "I've watched her every day since she was foaled, and I'll undertake to say as there isn't another like her in——"

"In the wide world: I know there isn't," said Scattergood, cutting him short. Then, suddenly, "What's her name?"

"Meg," replied the dealer, who was expecting a very different question.

"Meg—Meg," said the Doctor. "Why, it ought to be—— Well, never mind, Meg will do. So you bred her yourself? Will you swear you didn't *steal* her?"

This was too much even for a horse-dealer. "We're not a firm of horse-thieves," he said, and he was preparing to lead her back into the stable.

"I'm only joking," said Scattergood in a tremulous voice which belied him. "She's the living likeness of one I remember years ago—one that *was* stolen. Come, bring her back. I'm ready to buy that mare at her full value."

"And what may that be?" replied the dealer, glad that the enemy had made the first move.

"A hundred and twenty."

The dealer was astonished; for his customer had offered the exact sum at which he hoped

to sell the mare. For a moment he thought of standing out for a hundred and fifty, but he knew it was useless to bargain with Scattergood, so he said:

"It's giving her away, sir, at a hundred and twenty. But for the sake of quick business, and you being a gentleman as knows a horse when you sees one, I'll take you at your own figure."

"Done," said Scattergood. "I'll send you a cheque round in ten minutes." And without another word he walked out of the yard. He had found the perfect horse.

The dealer stood dumbfoundered, halter in hand—he was unconscious that Meg had already caught his shirt-sleeve between her teeth. Could that retreating figure be the wary Scattergood, Scattergood of the thousand awkward questions, Scattergood the terror of every horse-dealer in the countryside? Never before had he found so prompt, so reckless a customer. Were his eyes deceiving him? Was it a dream? A violent jerk on his right arm, and the simultaneous sound of tearing linen, recalled him to

himself. "You she-devil!" he said, "I'll take the skin off you for this. But I hope the old gentleman's well insured."

Meanwhile the Professor was walking home in a state of profound mental perturbation. Visions of the Embassy Ball in Vienna, Buddhist theories of reincarnation, problems of animal psychology, doubts as to the validity of the Inflexible Method, vague and nameless feelings that accompanied the disappearance of his "horse-sense," a yet vaguer joy as of one who has found something precious which he had lost, and beneath all the ever-present subconscious fear that he would find his wife narcotised on the drawing-room sofa, were buzzing and dancing through his mind.

"It's the *likeness* that puzzles me," he began to reflect. "A universal resemblance, borne by particulars not one of which is really like the original. Quite unmistakable, and yet quite unthinkable. An indubitable fact, and yet a fact which no one who has not seen could ever be induced to believe."

Had anyone half an hour earlier propounded

the statement that a woman could bear a closer resemblance to a horse than to her own portrait, he would have treated the proposition as one which no amount of evidence could make good. So far from the evidence proving the proposition true, he would have said, it is the proposition which proves the evidence false. Otherwise, what is the use of the Inflexible Method? But now the thing was flashed on him with the brightness of authentic revelation, and there was no gainsaying its truth. Not once during the five-and-thirty years of his mourning for Ethelberta had anything happened to bring her so vividly to mind; not even among the dreams that haunt the borderland of sleep and waking; no, nor even when he listened to the great singer whose voice had pierced his heart with the sad and angry music of Heine's bitterest song. Professor Scattergood was a firm believer in the efficacy of *a priori* thought; but though by means of it he had excogitated a system in which the plan of an entire Universe was sufficiently laid down, there was not one of

his principles either primary or secondary which could have built a niche for the experience he had just undergone in the horse-dealer's yard.

As he neared his doorstep the confusion of his mind suddenly ranged itself into form and gave birth to an articulate thought. "I'm sure," he said to himself, drawing his latch-key out of his pocket and inserting it in the key-hole—"I'm sure that Ethelberta is not far off. Yes, as sure as I am of anything in this world."

II

The "horse-sense," which gave Professor Scattergood his reputation in the stables, was always accompanied by a well-marked physical sensation—to wit, a continuous tingling at the back of the head, seemingly located at an exact spot in the cortex of the brain. So long as the back of his head was tingling, every horse was completely at Scattergood's mercy; he could do with it whatever he

willed. But I have it on his own authority that at the moment he cast eyes on his new mare the sensation suddenly ceased and his horse-sense deserted him.

Accordingly, the first time he took her out he mounted with trepidation, and fear possessed his soul that she would run away with him. Though nothing very serious followed, the fear was not entirely groundless. His daily ride, which usually occupied exactly two hours and five minutes, was accomplished on this occasion in one hour and twenty, and for a week afterwards the Professor's man rubbed liniment into his back three times a day. On the second occasion he had the ill luck to encounter the local Hunt in full career, a thing he would have minded not the least under ordinary circumstances, but extremely disconcerting at a moment when his horse-sense happened to be in abeyance. Before he had time to take in the situation, Meg joined the rushing tide, and for the next forty minutes the field was led by the first Systematic Theologian in Europe, who had given himself up for

lost and was preparing for death. And killed he probably would have been but for two things: the first was the fine qualities of his mount, and the second was a literary reminiscence which enabled him to retain his presence of mind. Even in these desperate circumstances, the Professor's habit of talking to himself remained in force. A friend of mine who was riding close behind him told me that he distinctly heard Scattergood repeating the lines of the *Odyssey* which tell how Ulysses, on the point of suffocation in the depths of the sea, kept his wits about him and made a spring for his raft the instant he rose to the surface. Again and again, as the Professor raced across the open, did he repeat those lines to himself; and whenever a dangerous fence or ditch came in sight he would break off in the middle of the Greek and cry aloud in English, "Now, John Scattergood, prepare for death and sit well back"—resuming the Greek the moment he was safely landed on the other side, and thus proving once more that the blood of the Ironsides still ran in his veins.

Said a farmer to me one day:

"Who's that gentleman as has just gone up the lane on the chestnut mare?"

"That," said I, "is Professor Scattergood—one of our greatest men."

"H'm," said the farmer; "I reckon he's a clergyman—to judge by his clothes."

"He is."

"Well, he's a queer 'un for a clergyman, danged if he isn't. He's allus talking aloud to himself. And what do you think I hear him say when he come through last Thursday? 'John Scattergood,' says he, 'you were a damned fool. Yes, there's no other word for it, John; you were a *damned* fool!'"

"That," I said, "is language which no clergyman ought to use, not even when he is talking to himself. But perhaps the words were not his own. They may have been used about him by some other person—possibly by his wife, who, people say, is a bit of a Tartar. In that case he would be just repeating them to himself, by way of refreshing his memory."

The farmer laughed at this explanation.

"I see you're a gentleman with a kind 'eart," said he. "But a man with a swearin' wife don't ride about the country lanes refreshin' his memory in that way. He knows his missus will do all the refreshin' he wants when he gets 'ome. No, you'll never persuade *me* as them words weren't the gentleman's own. From the way he said 'em you could see as they tasted good. Why, he said 'em just like this——"

And the farmer repeated the objectionable language, with a voice and manner that entirely disposed of my charitable theory. He then added: "Clergyman or no clergyman, I'll say one thing for him—he rides a good 'oss. I'll bet you five to one as that chestnut mare cost him a hundred and twenty guineas, if she cost him a penny."

From the tone in which the farmer said this I gathered that a gentleman whose 'oss cost him a hundred and twenty guineas was entitled to use any language he liked; and that my explanation, therefore, even if true, was superfluous.

What did the Professor mean by apostrophising himself in the strong language overheard by the farmer? The exegesis of the passage, it must be confessed, is obscure, and, not unnaturally, there is a division of opinion among the higher critics. Some, of whom I am one, argue that the words refer to a long-past error of judgment in the Professor's life; more precisely, to the loss of Ethelberta. Others maintain that this theory is far-fetched and fanciful. The Professor, they say, was plainly cursing himself for the purchase of Meg. For, is there not reason to believe that at the very moment when the obnoxious words were uttered he was again in trouble with the mare, and therefore in a state of mind likely to issue in the employment of this very expression?

Now, although I have always held the first of these two theories, I must hasten to concede the last point in the argument of the other side. It is a fact that at the very moment when the Professor cursed himself for a fool he was again in trouble with Meg. On

previous occasions her faults had been those of excess; but to-day she was erring by defect: instead of going too fast she was going too slow, and occasionally refusing to go at all. She would neither canter nor trot; it was with difficulty that she could be induced to walk, and then only at a snail's-pace; apparently she wanted to fly. In consequence of which the Professor's daily ride promised to occupy at least three hours, thereby causing him to be twenty-five minutes late for his afternoon lecture.

Meg's behaviour that day had been irritating to the last degree. She began by insisting on the wrong side of the road, and before Professor Scattergood could emerge from the traffic of the town he had been threatened with legal proceedings by two policemen and cursed by several drivers of wheeled vehicles. Arrived in the open country, Meg spent her time in examining the fields on either side of the road, in the hope apparently of again discovering the Hunt; she would dart down every lane and through every open gate, and

now and then would stop dead and gaze at the scenery in the most provoking manner. Coming to a blacksmith's shop with which she was acquainted, a desire for new shoes possessed her feminine soul, and, suddenly whisking round through the door of the shoeing shed, she knocked off the Professor's hat and almost decapitated him against the lintel. The Professor had not recovered from the shock of this incident when a black Berkshire pig that was being driven to market came in sight round a turn of the road. Meg, as became a highbred horse, positively refused to pass the unclean thing, or even to come within twenty yards of it. She snorted and pranced, reared and curveted, and was about to make a bolt for home when the pig-driver, who had considerately driven his charge into a field where it was out of sight, seized Meg's bridle and led her beyond the dangerous pass.

"Meg, Meg," said the professor, as soon as they were alone and order had been restored—"Meg, Meg, this will never do. You and I will have to part company. I don't mind

your *looking* like Ethelberta, but I can't allow you to *act* as she did. To be sure, Ethelberta broke my heart thirty-five years ago. But that is no reason why I should suffer *you* to break my neck to-day. We'll go home, Meg, and I'll take an early opportunity of breaking off the engagement, just as I broke it off with Ethelberta—though, between you and me, Meg, I was a damned fool for doing it."

Professor Scattergood spoke these words in a low, soft, musical voice; the voice he always used when talking to horses or to himself about Ethelberta. Even the obnoxious adjective was pronounced by the Professor with that tenderness of intonation which only a horse or a woman can fully understand. And here I must explain that this particular tone came to him naturally in these two connections only. In all others his voice was high-pitched, hard, and a trifle forced. Years of lecturing on Systematic Theology had considerably damaged his vocal apparatus. He had developed a throat-clutch; he had a distressing habit of ending all his sentences

on the rising inflection; and whenever he was the least excited in argument he had a tendency to scream. It was in this voice that he addressed his class. But whenever he happened to be talking to horses, or to himself about Ethelberta—and you might catch him doing so almost any time when he was alone, —you would hear something akin to music, and would reflect what a pity it was that Professor Scattergood had never learned to sing.

It was, I say, in this low, soft, musical voice that he addressed his mare, perhaps with some exceptional sadness, on the day when, sorely tried by her bad behaviour, he had come to the conclusion that the engagement must be broken off. And now I must once more risk my reputation for veracity; and if the pinch comes and I have to defend myself from the charge of lying, I shall appeal for confirmation to my old friend the ostler, who knows a great deal about 'osses, and believes my story through and through. What happened was this.

The moment Professor Scattergood began to

address his mare in the tones aforesaid, she stood stock-still, with ears reversed in the direction from which the sounds were coming. When he had finished, a gentle quiver passed through her body. Then, suddenly lowering her head, she turned it round with a quick movement towards the off stirrup, and slightly bit the toe of Professor Scattergood's boot. This done, she recovered her former attitude of attention, and again reversed her ears as though awaiting a response. Taking in the meaning of her act with a swift instinct which he never allowed to mar his treatment of Systematic Theology, the professor said one word — "Ethelberta"; and the word had hardly passed his lips when something began to tingle at the back of his head. Instantly the mare broke into the gentlest and evenest canter that ever delighted a horseman of sixty years; carried him through the remainder of his ride without a single hitch, shy, or other misdemeanour, and brought him to his own doorstep in exactly two hours and five minutes from the time he had left it. Thenceforward,

until the last day of his life, he never had the slightest trouble with his mare. That is the story which the ostler believes through and through.

Next day the Professor said to this man:

"Tom, I'm going to change the name of my mare."

"You can't do that, sir. You'll never get her to answer to a new name."

"I mean to try, anyhow. Here"—and he slipped half a sovereign into the man's hand. "You make this mare answer to the name of *Ethelberta*, and I'll give you as much more when it's done."

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the man, slipping the coin into his pocket—"Beg your pardon, sir, but there never was a 'oss with a name like that. It's not a 'oss's name at all, sir."

"Never mind that. Do as I tell you, and you won't regret it. Ethelberta—don't forget."

The groom touched his hat. Professor Scattergood left the stables, and presently the groom and his chief pal were rolling in laughter on a heap of straw.

A fortnight later the groom said:

"The mare answers wonderful well to that new name, sir. Stopped her kicking and biting altogether, sir. Why, the day before we give it her, she tore the shirt off my back and bit a hole in my breeches as big as a mangel-wurzel."

"I'll pay for both of them," said Professor Scattergood.

"Thank 'ee, sir. But since we give her the new name she's not even made as though she *wanted* to bite anybody. And as for kicking, why, you might take tea with your mother-in-law right under her heels and she wouldn't knock a saucer over. I nivver see such a thing in all my life, and don't expect nivver to see such another! *Wonderful*'s what I calls it! Though, since I've come to think of it, there *was* once a 'oss named Ethelberta as won the Buddle Stakes. Our foreman says as he remembers the year it won. Maybe as you had a bit yourself, sir, on that 'oss—though beg your pardon for saying so."

"Yes," said the Professor, "I backed Ethel-

berta for all I was worth, and won ten times as much. Only, some fellow stole the winnings out of my—my inner pocket just before I got home. It was thirty-five years ago."

"So it was a bit o' bad luck after all, sir?"

"It was," said Scattergood, "extremely bad luck."

"Did they ever catch the man, sir?"

"They did. They caught him within a year after the theft."

"I expect they give it 'im 'ot, sir?"

"Yes. He got a life-sentence, the same as mi—the same as that man got who was convicted the other day."

At this lame conclusion the groom looked puzzled, and Scattergood had to extricate himself. "You see, Tom," he went on, "the value of what I lost was enormous."

"It must have been a tidy haul to get the thief a sentence like that," said Tom. "But maybe he give you a tap on the head into the bargain, sir."

"He put a knife into me," said Scattergood, "and the wound aches to this day."

For some reason he felt an unwonted pleasure in pursuing this conversation with the sympathetic groom, and inwardly resolved that he would give him a handsome tip.

"Put a *knife* into you, did he?" cried Tom. "Why, that's just like what happened to *me* when I was coachman to his Lordship. We was livin' in Ireland, and it was the days of the Land League. Me and his Lordship had been to Ballymunny Races, and his Lordship had got his pockets stuffed full o' money as he'd won, and I don't say I hadn't won a bit myself, seein' as I allus backed the same 'osses as he did. Well, we had about fifteen miles to drive in the dark, and before we starts his Lordship says to me, 'Tom, my lad,' he says, 'go round the town and buy me the most grievous big stick you can find in the place.' 'What's that for, my Lord?' I says, for me and his Lordship was a'most like brothers. 'Tom,' he says, 'I've been losin' my 'orse-sense all day, and whenever that happens I knows there's trouble a-brewin'.' So I goes and buys him a stick, and a beauty it were, too,

made o' bog oak, and that 'eavy that I couldn't elp feelin' sorry for the wife o' the man as was goin' to get it on the top of 'is 'ead. 'All right, Tom,' says his Lordship as he jumps on the car; 'and give the reins a turn round the palm o' your 'and.' So off we starts, and we 'adn't gone more than four miles when three men springs out on us just like shadows. 'Look out, my Lord,' I shouts; 'there's three on 'em!' His Lordship, as was sitting just behind me, he hits out splendid, and I could 'ear his big stick going crack, crack on their 'eads. 'Well done, my Lord!' I shouts. '*Hit* 'em, my Lord!' I says; 'give it 'em 'ome-brewed!' 'It's hittin' 'em that I'm after,' says he. 'I've made one on 'em comfortable. Tom, you're a great boy for choosin' a stick; but what's become o' that big fellow?' 'He's on the near side, creepin' under the car,' I says; 'look out for that one, my Lord; he's got a knife!' And I was just givin' the reins another turn round the palm o' my 'and when I feels summat sharp under my right shoulder-blade, and I begins catchin' my breath. The

last as I remember was seein' his Lordship bendin' over me, like as if he'd been my own mother. 'Tom, my own darlin',' he says, 'if the black villains have killed you, it's a sorrowin' man I'll be for the rest of my days. But I've given that big one a sleepin'-draught as he won't wake up till the Angel Gabriel knocks at his bedroom door.'—I'd got it proper, I can tell you! Touched the lung, too, that it did; and whenever I catches a bit o' cold and begins coughin', it's that painful that I can't——'"

"Ay, ay," said Scattergood. "Well, here's something that's good for an old wound—though," he muttered to himself, as he rode away, "it never made much difference to mine." He had given the man a sovereign.

As the Professor walked his horse down the yard, Tom said to his pal, "'E must ha' bin a warm 'un in his young days. Good-'earted, too. But why the old bloke should call his 'oss Ethelberta, seeing he lost his money after all, licks me 'oller."

"Just look at the pair on 'em!" said the

pal. "Why, to see that mare walkin' down the yard, you might think as she was a little gel goin' to Sunday-school. But you'll never persuade *me* as she isn't foxin'. She'll do a down on him yet, you mark my word! She's as tricky as a woman. I can see it in her eye."

"Ha!" said Tom, "that reminds me of something his Lordship once said to me. It 'appened at the Dublin 'Orse Show, as his Lordship was one o' the judges, with me by to 'elp 'im. There was a roan mare just brought into the ring, and his Lordship says to me, lookin' 'ard at the mare all the time, 'Tom, my boy,' he says, 'did you ever 'ave a sweetheart?' 'Yes, my Lord,' I says, 'several.' 'Are they livin' or dead?' says he. 'I never killed none on 'em, my Lord,' I says; 'that's all *I* knows about it.' 'Treat 'em 'andsome, my boy, treat 'em 'andsome,' says he in the solemnest voice you ever 'eard; 'it's desperate bad luck on a man as has to do wi' 'osses when a' angry sweetheart dies on him. And look 'ere, Tom,' he says in a whisper, 'from

the way the back o' my 'ead's a-tinglin', *it's a' angry sweetheart as we're judgin' now.*— Pass her down,' he says to the groom as were leadin' the mare, 'pass her down. Divil a prize shall that one have! She's a dangerous bad 'oss."

III

Among Professor Scattergood's numerous admirers there have always been some to whom his arguments for the Friendliness of the Universe proved unconvincing. They would begin by pulling his logic to pieces, and conclude by saying, with the air of people who keep their strongest argument to the last: "It looks, at all events, as though the friendly Universe had done our good Professor a most unfriendly turn by depriving him of Ethelberta and substituting the present Mrs Scattergood in her place." And there was no denying the force of the argument.

For half a long lifetime John Scattergood had lived his earnest days with little aid from

those sources of spiritual vitality upon which most of us depend. Love in all its finer essences had been denied him—denied him, as he knew better than anybody, by that very Universe whose friendliness he had set himself to prove. Among the many lonely souls who live in crowded places it would be hard to find one lonelier than he. Even the demonstrated friendliness of the Universe did not seem to thaw his heart, or to break down the barriers of his reserve. The surest means of discovering his inner mind was to put your ear to the keyhole on one of the many occasions when he was talking to himself. "*Wie brennt mein alte Wunde!*" is what you would often hear him say.

Mrs Scattergood was said to have once been a very beautiful woman; and I can well believe it was even so. She was the daughter of a baronet, and had been brought up to think that the mission of women in this world is to have a good time. But her husband had thwarted this mission; at all events, he had not provided its fulfilment. And the lady

made it a point of daily practice to remind him of the failure, driving the reminder home with the help of expletives learnt in her father's stables long ago. John Scattergood would retire from these interviews talking to himself. "If I could keep her from the morphia," he would say, "I think I could bear the rest." He would then shut himself up in his study, would take out the miniature of Ethelberta from his secret drawer—a foolish thing to do, but a thing which somehow he couldn't help; would shake his head and say for the thousandth time, "Wie brennt mein alte Wunde!" After which, having brushed aside a tear, he would take up his pen and continue his proof of the Friendliness of the Universe according to the Inflexible Method.

If Scattergood could have seen himself, as I see him in memory, seated in his quiet study, with the household skeleton, the philosophical thesis, and the gold-rimmed miniature of Ethelberta, in their respective positions, forming as it were the three points of a mystic triangle, I think he might have discerned in the Universe

something of deeper import than ever appeared within the four corners of his philosophy. But alas! All Q.E.D.'s are fatal to emotion, and it was Q.E.D. that Scattergood had placed at the end of his great thesis. In some respects he resembled that other great philosopher who became so absorbed in his proof of the existence of God that he forgot to say his prayers. The fact of the matter is, that after proving the ultimate nature of the Universe to be friendly his heart was no warmer than before. Indeed, his interest in that august Object had stiffened into the chill rigidity of a professional pose. His thesis, by becoming demonstrably true, had ceased to be morally exciting. He actually looked forward to his afternoon ride as a means of getting the taste of the Universe out of his mouth.

By long and devious ways, John Scattergood had thus arrived at the point from which he had set out; he had arrived, I mean, at that extremely common state of mind when one actual smile seen on the face of the world, or a moment of contact with any one of the in-

numerable friendly presences which the world harbours, was worth more to him, both as philosopher and man, than were all the achievements of the Inflexible Method, past, present, and to come. And I have now to record that such a smile was vouchsafed to him, and such a living contact provided, by the mediation of a four-footed beast.

Let no one suppose, however, that our Professor was led astray by fatuous fancies concerning his mare. He did not jump to the conclusion that she was a reincarnation of the long-lost Ethelberta. The Inflexible Method, thank God, saved him from that. But if you ask me how it all came about, I am bound to confess I don't know. All we can be sure of is that his mare did for Professor Scattergood something which a lifetime of reflection had been unable to accomplish. No doubt the lifetime of reflection had dried the fuel. But it was the influence of Ethelberta that brought the flame.

"It's quite true," he said one day, "that I prepare my lectures on horseback; and people

tell me that I have fallen into a habit of preparing them aloud. But the fact is, I am going to deliver a new course; and I find that horse-exercise quickens the action of the brain—a necessary thing at my time of life, when one's powers of expression are on the wane, and new ideas increasingly difficult to put into form."

"You ride a beautiful animal," said his interlocutor.

"Yes, and as good as she's beautiful." And then in his softest voice he repeated the line:

"Tra bell' e buona, non so qual fosse più."

This favourable view of Ethelberta's qualities was by no means convincing to Professor Scattergood's friends. We knew she was "bella"; but we doubted the "buona." The spectacle of an elderly Doctor of Divinity setting out for his daily ride on a magnificent racehorse in the pink of condition was indeed a vision to fill the bold with astonishment and the timid with alarm. "The man is mad," said some; "will no one warn him of his danger?" Various attempts were made, but they came to nothing. Knowing myself to be

the least cogent of advisers, I kept silence to the last; but when all the others had failed I resolved to try my hand.

"Scattergood," I said, "that thoroughbred of yours is not a suitable mount for a man of your years. She ought to be ridden by a jockey. I wish to Heaven you would sell her."

"Nothing in this world would induce me to part with Ethelberta," he answered.

"I'm sorry to hear it. There's no man living in England at this moment whose life is more precious than yours. We can't afford to lose you. Then think of your——" I was going to say "your wife," but I checked myself in time: "Think of your work. It's a very serious matter. Sure as fate that brute" —("She's not a *brute*," he interrupted)— "sure as fate that beauty will run away with you one of these days and break your neck."

"How do you know that?" he asked quietly.

"Because she's run away with you twice already, and you escaped only by a miracle. She'll do it again, and next time you may not be quite so fortunate."

"She'll never do it again," he said in the same quiet voice.

"How do you know that?" I said, thinking that I had turned the tables on him.

"Never mind how. I know it well enough."

"By the Inflexible Method?"

"Of course not," he said with some annoyance. "There are different kinds of certainty, and this is one of the most certain of all."

"More certain than the Inflexible——?"

"Oh, damn the Inflexible Method!" he cried. "I'm sick to death of it. You'll do me a kindness by not mentioning it again."

"All right; I'm as sick of it as you are. After all, it's not your philosophy I'm thinking of; what I am concerned about is your life. Now, Scattergood," I added—for I was an old friend,—"frankly, between you and me, don't you think you're a fool?"

"My dear fellow, I am and always have been a ——" and here he used that objectionable word—"always have been a certain sort of fool. But not about Ethelberta. We understand each other perfectly. She looks

after me and takes care of me like a—like a mother. My life is absolutely safe in her hands—I mean, of course, on her back."

"Confound those mixed metaphors!" I cried. "That's the seventh I've heard to-day, and they're horribly confusing, even when they are corrected as you corrected yours. Now, what on earth do you mean?"

He looked at me curiously. "I mean," he said, "that Ethelberta may be trusted to the uttermost."

"Scattergood," I said, "there's a sort of friendship in the Universe which does not scruple on occasion to break every bone in a man's body, and I greatly fear that Ethelberta may be one of its ministers. Now, here's a plain question. Would you be prepared to stand before your class to-morrow morning and bid them trust the Universe for no better reasons than those on which you trust your life to the tender mercies of that bru—— of Ethelberta?'

"I only wish I could find them reasons half as good."

"Half as good as what?"

"As those for which I trust my life to Ethelberta."

"What are they?"

"I can't tell you. If I did tell, the reasons would lose their force. But until they are uttered they are quite conclusive."

"What!" I cried; "are the reasons *taboo*? Have you found a magic formula?"

"Don't jest," he said. "The matter's far too serious. There is more at stake than the mere safety of my life."

"Then you admit your life *is* at stake," said I; and I thought I had scored a point.

"No, I don't. But other things are—things of far greater importance. My life, however, runs no risk from Ethelberta."

"Then tell me this. Who runs the bigger risk—you who trust your life to a beast for no reasons you can assign; or we, your disciples, who trust ourselves to the Universe in the name of your philosophy?"

"By far the bigger risk," he answered, "is yours."

"Then you mean to say that you have

better reasons for trusting your beast than we have for trusting your system?"

"I do."

"You are quite serious?"

"I am."

"But follow this out," I said. "If we, your disciples, run the bigger risk in trusting ourselves to your system, you, its author, run the same risk yourself."

"You're strangely mistaken," he answered.

"Surely," said I, "we are all in the same boat. What reasons can you have, other than those you have given us, for trusting your conclusion as to the friendliness of the Universe?"

"You forget," he said. "In addition to the reasons I have given you, I have all those which induce me to trust my life to Ethelberta."

"But how do they affect your philosophy?"

"They affect it vitally."

"In the way of confirmation or otherwise?"

"Confirmation."

"You mean that your philosophy is already

conclusively proved, and yet made more conclusive by Ethelberta?"

"Put it that way, if you like."

"Is there no hope," I asked, "that you will be able one day to communicate the reasons to *us*?"

"None," he answered. "But what I can do, and will do, if I live long enough, is to show that all of you are acting much as I am acting in regard to Ethelberta."

"But we are not all risking our lives on thoroughbred horses."

"You are running far bigger risks than that," he said; "and you are fools not to see it. Did I not tell you that I am revising my lectures?"

"Scattergood," I said, "it's plain to me that you will have to do one of two things. Either you must radically change your system—or you must sell Ethelberta. Personally, I hope you'll do the last."

"In any case," he replied, "I shall not sell Ethelberta."

"Then," said I, "may the friendly Universe

preserve you from being killed." And with that I took my departure.

IV

THAT very afternoon, Professor Scattergood, arrayed in a pair of goodly riding-boots, went round to the stables to mount his mare. The groom met him as usual.

"She's been wonderful restless all night, sir," said he. "She's broke her halter and a'most kicked the door out. And she's bitin' as though she'd just been married to the devil's son."

"She wants exercise," said Scattergood. "Put the saddle on at once."

"Not me, sir!" answered the groom. "It's as much as a man's life's worth to go near her."

"Bring me the saddle, then, and I'll do it myself," said Scattergood. He opened the door of the stable, and the moment the light was let in Ethelberta announced her intentions by a smashing kick on the wooden partition.

"Have a care, sir," cried the terrified groom, as Scattergood, with the saddle on his arm, passed through the door. "She'll give you no time to say yer prayers. Look out, sir! She'll whip round on you like a bit o' sin and put her heel through you before you know where you are. Good Lord!" he added, addressing another man, "it's a *hexecution*! The gen'l'man'll be in heaven in less than half a minute."

"Ethelberta, Ethelberta, what's the meaning of all this?" said Scattergood in a quiet voice, as he faced the animal's blazing eyes. "Come, come, sweetheart, let us behave for once like rational beings." And he put his arm round Ethelberta's neck and rubbed his cheek against her nose.

In five minutes the saddle was on, and Scattergood, seated on as quiet a beast as ever submitted to bridle, was riding down the stable-yard.

"That ole Johnnie knows a trick or two about 'osses," said the groom as soon as the Professor was out of hearing. "I'd give a

month's wages to know how he quieted that mare. Did ye 'ear 'im talkin' to 'er, Bill? Well, could you 'ear what 'e said? No? Well, you listen the next time you 'ear 'im talkin' to her and see if you can get the very words 'e says. It's the *words* as does it; and if we can find out what they are, it'll be worth 'undreds o' pounds to you and me. I tell yer, it's the *words* as does it! I reckon as it's summat out o' the Bible. Why, when I was groom to Lord Charles I knowed a man as give Scripture to 'osses regular. A Psalm-smitin' ole teapot he were; and whenever we'd got a kicker, he used to put his 'ead in at the stable-door and say a hymn. Then he'd go in and get 'old o' the 'oss's ear between his teeth and say texts o' Scripture right into it's ear-'ole. I've knowed a gen'l'man give him five pounds for scripturin' a 'oss. Only, don't you let on to the other blokes what I've told you now. Keep it quiet, Bill, and you be here wi' me when Dr Scattergood comes back at four o'clock."

"All right," said Bill; "we'll get the *words*

—but they won't be no use to *us* when we've got 'em. I've 'eard all about scripturin' 'osses, but you won't ketch me tryin' it on—I can tell yer *that*! You know that saller-faced man as works for Bullivant—'im as limps on his left leg?"

"Do you mean 'im wi' the watery eyes?" asked the other.

"That's 'im. Well, he was takin' some poloponies to London, and one on 'em was a bit o reg'lar hot ginger, and begins buckin' one day in the middle o' the road. There was a chap workin' in a field as sees what was goin' on, and 'e comes up and offers to scripture the pony for a pint o' ale. So he takes the pony's ear in his teeth and scriptures 'im same as that man did as was workin' wi' you at Lord Charles's. '*Genesis and Revelations*,' he says, whispering into the pony's ear; and the pony became as quiet as a lamb. The saller-faced chap 'eard 'im, and says 'e to 'imself, 'I'll remember them words.' So the next time as they had a kicker at Bullivant's, the saller-faced chap thinks 'e'll try 'is 'and at scripturin' 'im.

So out he goes for a drop o' whisky, to put a bit o' 'eart into 'im, for between you and me 'e didn't 'alf like his job. Then he goes into the stables and makes a grab at the 'oss's ear. But the 'oss catches 'old of his breeches with his teeth and pitches 'im to the back o' the stable in no time. The saller-faced chap, seeing 'imself under the 'oss's 'eels, roars out '*Genesis and Revelations*' just as though 'is 'ouse was on fire. And no sooner had 'e spoken them words than the 'oss let 'im 'ave it red-'ot. Broke 'is thigh in two places, that it did, and kep 'im in 'orspital three months. And that's 'ow 'e got 'is limp."

"Looks as though it were no use gettin' the right words unless you're the *right sort o' man*," said the other groom.

"That's what does it," answered Bill. "My old dad, as was in the Balaklava Charge, used to say as no man could scripture a 'oss unless he'd been *converted*."

"I reckon that's what 'appened to old Shiny-boots and his Ethelberta. Haven't I always said that he must 'a been a warm 'un

in his young days? What about 'im puttin' his money on that 'oss as won the Buddle Stakes? And what about 'im bein' robbed of his winnings just as 'e was gettin' 'ome? He 'adn't got 'is white tie on then, Bill, eh? What state must a man be in when 'e comes 'ome after a race and lets another feller pinch his money out of his inside pocket?"

"Drunk as a lord, no doubt," said Bill; "though to see the old joker now you wouldn't think it."

Meanwhile Professor Scattergood, after trotting three or four miles down the London Road, had turned into the by-lane that led to the villages of Medbury and Charlton Towers. Up to this point the behaviour of Ethelberta had been beyond reproach. But as they turned down the lane a tramp with a wooden leg, who was nursing a fire of sticks in the hedge, some fifty yards ahead, got up and stepped out into the road. For a few moments Ethelberta did not see him, and maintained her swinging trot. Professor

Scattergood tightened his grip. The mare went on until the tramp was not more than five paces distant, and then, suddenly noticing his deformity, she planted her fore-feet and stopped dead. Scattergood, nearly unhorsed by the sudden stoppage, was thrown off his guard, and in momentary confusion of mind called out in his rasping voice, "Steady, Meg, steady!"

"*Meg*": the sound stung Ethelberta like the lash of a whip, and in an instant she was off.

Professor Scattergood did not lose his presence of mind. For a moment he tried to check the bolting mare, but feeling her mouth like iron he loosened his rein and let her race. He knew the road for the next five miles was fairly straight, except at one point; there was a long steep hill on this side of Charlton Towers, and he reflected that his mare was certain to be blown before she reached the top. He could keep his seat, and, barring a collision with some passing vehicle, the chances were that he would win through. He shouted, indeed, and tried such resources of language

as his breathlessness allowed; but Ethelberta was far beyond the reach of endearments, and the race had to be run. So Scattergood sat tight and awaited the issue.

His mind was perfectly clear. It seemed as if his desperate condition had given him a large quiet leisure for introspection. As objects on the road shot by him he noted each one; and, with a curious double consciousness, began watching the flow of his own thoughts. He even wondered at the calmness and lucidity of his mind, and asked himself the reason. "Perhaps it is the imminence of death," he reflected; "but death, now that it has come so near, has no terrors. That is John Hawksbury's cottage. I wonder if his son has returned from India. I must be careful on the bridge. God grant that we don't meet a cart!"

They were nearing a village, and Scattergood heard the pealing of bells mingled with the roar of the wind in his ear. As they shot past the church he saw a wedding-party standing aghast in the churchyard. He saw the bride,

leaning on the bridegroom's arm. The party had just emerged from the porch, and the look of terror on the bride's face was clearly visible to Scattergood. "Poor girl," he reflected; "she'll take this for a bad omen." He saw men running and heard their shouts. At the end of the village street a brave lad stood with arms outstretched. "A hero," thought Scattergood; "he will surely be rewarded in the resurrection of the just."

They were out of the village in a flash. A furlong beyond it the road turned sharply at right angles. "She will jump the hedge at that point," thought Scattergood; "I must be ready." Ethelberta swung round the bend with hardly a check; but the rider, ready for that also, still kept his seat. A moment later she leapt over some obstacle in the road which Scattergood, short-sighted as he was, could not see. His glasses were gone, and the cold wind beating in his eyes had half blinded him. He was losing the sense of his whereabouts, and there were moments when he saw himself as a mere inanimate object held in the grip of

the brute force that was pulsing beneath him. "And yet," he reflected, "I am not utterly abandoned after all. I know what is happening; the leaf on the torrent knows nothing. A point for a lecture on Necessity and Freedom—all the difference between the two involved in that single fact! To have one's wits about him and be unafraid—what a power is that to break the ruling of Fate! Nothing save a shock can unhorse me. It is a match between Pure Reason in Scattergood and madness in Ethelberta. Would that it had been so in the old days! But, please God, I shall beat her this time. Ha! She's giving in!"

They were breasting the two-mile hill on this side Charlton Towers, and with the rise in the gradient came a slackening of the pace. Ethelberta, with head down, still held the bit between her teeth; but the first rush of her speed was exhausted. Scattergood felt the difference instantly, and marked its gradual increase, promising himself that he would have her in hand before they reached the level ground on the top of the hill. Some

distance ahead of him he could dimly see the form of a tall tree. With admirable presence of mind he roughly measured the distance and said to himself: "On passing that tree, but not before, I will tighten the rein, and gradually tighten it until on reaching the summit I shall have completely pulled her up."

They were almost abreast of the tree when a dark-plumaged bird, frightened from its roost, fluttered out of the upper branches and flew with a whir of wings right athwart the road. At the sight of the black object, flung as it were into her eyes, Ethelberta made a rapid swerve, and, placing her near fore-foot on a rolling stone, plunged forward with her head between her knees. Down she came, almost turning a somersault with the violence of her impetus, and Professor Scattergood, hurled far out of his saddle, fell prone with a terrific shock on the newly metalled road.

When consciousness at length returned it brought no pain of wounds; but cold pierced him like a knife and a shock of sounds was in

his ears. A flood of memories was sweeping over him. Beginning in the distant past, and streaming through the years with incredible rapidity, they terminated abruptly in a vision seen far below him, as though he were a watcher in the skies. He saw a deeply wounded man lying outstretched, as it seemed, on the circumpolar ice, and a horse stood by him like a ministering priest. The horse was warming the man with its breath, and the steam of its body rose high into the frozen air. The consciousness of Scattergood, hovering in a present which had well-nigh become a past, was on the borderland which separates a running experience from a completed fact—vaguely suffering, yet aloof from the sufferer, whom he seemed to remember as one who long ago endured the bitterness of death. The vision was hardly more than a spectacle, the last link in a long chain of memories, and the past would have claimed it entirely had not the stunning sounds still fettered some fragment of conscious distress in the body of the freezing man.

The din increased, and in great bewilderment of mind he began to seek for its cause. Now it was one thing, now another. "This sound," he thought, "is the grind and roar of colliding ice-floes and the crackle of the Northern Lights." The sounds thus identified immediately became something else. They seemed to scatter and retreat, and then, concentrating again, returned as the tolling of an enormous bell. Nearer and nearer it came till the quivering metal lay close against his ear and the iron tongue of the bell smote him like a bludgeon.

A warmth passed over his face and a troubled thought began to disturb him. "I am sleeping through the summer; I must rouse myself before winter comes back." And with a great reluctant effort he opened his eyes.

A scarlet veil hung before them. He tried to thrust it aside with his hands, which seemed to fail him and miss the mark. Succeeding at last, he saw a vast creature standing motionless above him, its hot breath mingling with his, its great eyes, only a hand-breadth

away, looking with infinite tenderness into his own.

He tried to recollect himself, and something in his hand gave him a clue. "This thing," he mused, "is surely my handkerchief. It belongs to John Scattergood. It is one of a dozen his poor drug-sodden wife gave him on Christmas Day. And here, close to me, is Ethelberta. How red her feet are!" And he stared vacantly at a deep gash on Ethelberta's chest, and watched the great gouts that were dripping from her knees and forming crimson pools around her hoofs.

The crimson pools were full of mystery; they fascinated and troubled him; they were problems in philosophy he couldn't solve. "Surely," he thought, "I *have* solved them, but forgotten the solution. I have lost the notes of my lecture. Dyed garments from Bozrah—red, red! The colour of my doctor's gown—I have trodden the wine-press alone. The colour of poppies—drowsy syrups—deadly drugs! The ground-tint of the Universe—a difficult problem! Strange that a friendly

Universe should be so red. Gentlemen, I am not well to-day—don't laugh at a sick man. The red is quite simple. It only means that someone is hurt. Not I, certainly. Who can it be? Ah, now I see. Poor old girl!" And he feebly reached out his handkerchief, already soaked with his own blood, as though he would staunch the streaming wounds of Ethelberta.

As he did this, the great bell broke out afresh. It fell away into the distance. A second joined it; a third, a fourth, a fifth, until a whole peal was ringing and the air seemed full of music and of summer warmth.

Then Scattergood began to dream his last dream, ineffably content.

He stood by the open door of a church: inside he could see the ringers pulling at the ropes. And Ethelberta, young and happy as himself, was leaning on his arm.

"Sweetheart," she whispered, "let us behave ourselves like rational beings."

He laughed and would have spoken. But a din of clattering hoofs, which drowned the pealing of the bells, struck him dumb. The

swift image of a grey-headed man, riding a maddened horse, shot out of the darkness, passed by, and vanished; and the wedding-party stood aghast.

"Who is yonder rider?" he said, with a great effort, bending over Ethelberta.

"A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," said a soft voice in his ear.

A thousand echoes caught up the words and flung them far abroad. Then thunders awoke behind, and rolled after the echoes like pursuing cavalry. "*A man of sorrows*," cried the echoes. "*He has come through great tribulations*," the thunders shouted in reply.

On went the chase, the flying echoes in retreat, the deep-voiced thunder in pursuit. Then Scattergood saw himself swept into the torrent of riders, and it seemed as if the solid frame of things were dissolved into a flight of whispers and a pursuit of shouts. A fugitive secret, that fled with unapproachable speed, was the quarry, and the hunters were billows of sound, and the rhythm of beating hoofs gave the time to their undulations. A tide of

joy awoke within the dreamer; he was horsed on the thunder; he was leading the field; he was close on the heels of the game; he was captain of the host to an innumerable company of loud-voiced and meaningless things. Then would come expansions, accelerations, and sudden checks. Fissures yawned in front; mountains barred the way; the time was broken, and voices from the rear were calling a halt. But the thunders have the bit between their teeth; they are clearing the chasms; they are leaping over the mountain tops; and clouds of witnesses are shouting "Well done!" The wide heavens fill with the tumult; myriads of eager stars are watching, and great waters are clapping their hands.

"Who is this that leads the chase?" a voice was asking. "Who is this that feels the thunder leap beneath him like a living thing?" "It is I—John Scattergood—it is I!" And ever before him fled the secret; it mocked the chasing squadrons, and the wild winds aided its flight.

And now the pursuer perceived himself

pursued. A swarm of troubled thoughts, on winged horses, was overtaking him. They swept by on either side; they forged ahead; they pressed close and jostled him on his rocking seat. There was a shock; the thunder collapsed beneath him, and he fell and fell into bottomless gloom.

Suddenly his fall was stayed. A hand caught him; a presence encircled him, something touched him on the lips, and a voice said, "At last! At last!"

. . . . . .

Professor Scattergood was sitting on the stones, his body bowed forward, his hands feebly clasped round the head of his motionless horse; the breath of life was leaving him, and his heart was almost still. Then the dying flame flickered once more. He opened his eyes, gazing into the darkness like one who sees a long-awaited star. His fingers tightened; he seemed to draw the head of Ethelberta a little nearer his own; and it was as if they two were holding some colloquy of love.

In the twinkling of an eye it was done, and

the pallor of death crept over the wounded face. The clasped hands, with the blood-stained handkerchief still between them, slowly relaxed; the glance withered; the arms fell; the head drooped. It rested for a moment on the soft muzzle of the beast; and then, with a quiet breath, the whole body rolled backwards and lay face upward to the stars.

Clouds swept over the sky, the winds were hushed, and the dense darkness of a winter's night fell like a pall over the dead. Not a soul came nigh the spot, and for hours the silence was unbroken by the footfall of any living creature or by the stirring of a withered leaf. And far away in the dead's man's home lay an oblivious woman, drenched in the sleep of opium.

It was near midnight when a carrier's cart, drawn by an old horse and lit by a feeble lantern, began to climb the silent hill. Weary with the labours of a long day, the carrier sat dozing among the village merchandise. Suddenly he woke with a start: his cart had

stopped. Leaning forward, he peered ahead; and the gleam of his lantern fell on the stark figure of a man lying in the middle of the road. A larger mass, dimly outlined, lay immediately beyond. Raising his light a little higher, the carrier saw that the further object was the dead body of a horse.

FARMER JEREMY AND HIS WAYS

MR JEREMY'S system for the regulation of human life was summed up in the maxim, "Put your back into it"; and a lifetime of practising what he preached has endowed that part, or aspect, of his person with an astonishing vitality and developed it to an enormous size. Not without reason did our yeomanry sergeant exhibit his stock joke by informing Jeremy on parade that if only his head had been set the other way he would have had the finest chest in the British army.

But the full significance of Jeremy's back was not to be perceived by one who looked upon it from the drill-sergeant's point of view. It was not only the broadest but the most expressive organ of the farmer's body, and a

poet's eye was needed to interpret the meaning it conveyed. For myself, I should never have suspected that it meant anything more than great physical strength employed in a strenuous life, had not a poetical friend of mine taken the matter up and enlightened me. My friend and I were crossing a field by the footpath, and Jeremy, walking rapidly in the same direction, was a few yards ahead.

"There goes a man," I whispered, "who is worth your study. You could write a poem about him. He's one of the few remaining specimens of a type that is becoming extinct. He represents agriculture as it was before the advent of science and Radical legislation. He is the most honest and prosperous farmer in the county: a man, moreover, who has endured many sorrows and conquered them. Let us overtake him, for I should like you to see him face to face."

"Not so," said my friend. "The man's history, as you have told it, and much more beside, is written on his back. Let us remain, therefore, as we are, and study him

where such men can best be studied, from the rear. His back, I perceive, especially the upper portion of it, is the principal organ of his intelligence. Observe, he is thinking with his back even now — he hitched his trousers up a moment ago. His thoughts are pleasant—you can see it in the rhythmical movement of the muscles under his coat. He has some great design on hand and is sure he can carry it through—see how his shoulders, as he swings along, seem to be tumbling forward over his chest. He has had great sorrows —the droop in the cervical vertebræ confirms it; he has conquered them—hence that forward plunge into his task. He understands his business; of course; for the back is the organ by which all business is understood. He is honest; he is temperate; he has never broken the seventh commandment. You can read his innocence in the back of his head—I wish mine were like his." And my poetical friend turned round and showed me his villainous cerebellum.

Thus enlightened, I began a closer study of

the farmer's habits. I saw a new significance in an odd trick he had of suddenly swinging round on his heels at the interesting point of a conversation and delivering his remarks, and sometimes shaking his fist, with his back to the interlocutor. I say his back, but functionally considered it was not so; since at those moments the functions of the two sides of his body were interchanged, the organ of expression being the side now towards you, with every smile and frown accurately registered in the creases of the coat as they followed the movements of the muscles beneath. So, too, when Jeremy laughed. No doubt his face, while laughing, was expressive enough, but you couldn't see it, because it was turned the other way. What you did see was the farmer's coat, *a tergo*, twitching up and down as though pulled by a cord and then suddenly released like a Venetian blind; and this was quite enough to ensure your hearty participation in the merriment.

I also managed to take several interesting photographs from the rear; and (may the

saints forgive him!) a young gentleman of my acquaintance once attempted to snapshot the hinder parts of Jeremy while in church. Unfortunately the light was bad, and the negative proved a failure. Otherwise my poetical friend, for whom I intended the photograph, would certainly have found in it material for a new poem. Be it recorded that Jeremy when engaged in devotion did not kneel, but stretched his body forward from the seat to the book-rest, presenting his back to the heavens and his face to the inner regions of the earth; and, as his body was very long and the pew very wide, the back formed a solid and substantial bridge over which you might have trundled a wheelbarrow laden with turnips. No photograph, indeed, save one of the cinematograph order, the apparatus for which was too large to lie concealed beneath the young gentleman's waistcoat, would have reproduced the creepings, ripplings, and dimplings of the farmer's coat. These gave animation to the picture; but even without them, the mere contour of the mass, thrust upwards like the back of a

diving whale, was a spectacle of vigour and concentrated purpose of which my poetical friend would not have lost the significance.

Jeremy was the oldest of the Duke's tenantry, and the land he farmed, which was of high quality throughout, had been held by his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, and by ancestors of yet remoter date. If there is any calling in which heredity is of importance to success it is surely the farmer's, and Jeremy was fully conscious that he "had it in the blood," and recognised the debt he owed to his fathers before him.

People are wont to criticise the old-fashioned farmer as a stiff and unadaptable person; but what struck me about Jeremy, who was old-fashioned enough, was the adaptiveness and flexibility of his mind in dealing with the ever-varying conditions the farmer has to face. He had an extraordinary instinct for doing the right thing at the right time, and handled his land as though it were a living thing, with a kind of unconscious tact which seemed to me the exact opposite to that blind and mechanical

following of habit which so often, but so mistakenly, is said to be the standing fault of his class. Obstinate and incredulous as he seemed to the new teachings of veterinary or agricultural science, I yet noticed that Jeremy managed to absorb enough of these things to produce the results he desired; and though he never absorbed as much of them as the experts required, his crops were always larger and his stock healthier than those of his neighbours whose farming was strictly according to the modern card.

I have read one or two books on the nature of soils, and it is not without significance to me that the little, the very little, useful knowledge I have of these things was derived not from the books but from Mr Jeremy. There was a bit of ground in my garden where I could make nothing grow, and I hunted in vain through all the gardening books I could find for a remedy, and even went the length of consulting some of the gifted authors, two of whom were ladies. I sent them specimens of the soil for examination; they teased them

with formulæ and tormented them with acids; they boiled them in retorts and pickled them in glass tubes; they sent me the names of marauding bacteria whose lodgings they had discovered in that morsel of earth: and I, following their instructions, dosed the land with atrocious chemicals, until the earth-worms sickened and the very snails forsook the tainted spot. Still nothing would grow.

Then came Mr Jeremy. He picked up a handful of the soil; gazed at it as a lapidary gazes at diamonds; smelt it; felt it tenderly with his forefinger; spat upon it; rubbed the mixture on his breeches; inspected the result, first on his breeches and then on his hand—and now my barren patch is blossoming like the garden of the Lord. The others had advised me to try I know not what—nitrates of this and phosphates of that, sulphates of the other and carbonates of something else. Mr Jeremy said, "Chuck a cart-load o' fine sand on her and then rip her up."

Mr Jeremy, I have said, was aware that his roots struck deeply into the past, and this

consciousness, I believe, helped to give him that confidence in himself without which no man can successfully till the earth or battle with destiny—the two things, I believe, being at bottom much the same.

His farmhouse, so far as I could judge, was built—and built of almost imperishable stone—in the later years of the reign of Charles II., and had never been structurally modified since its erection. Some of the out-buildings were of yet earlier date. Scattered about in odd corners were not a few interesting relics of the past. For example, there was a case of coins, which had been arranged for Jeremy by the late Rector's wife, representing every reign from Charles I. to George IV., every one of which coins had been dug up on the farm. In the big courtyard there was a block of hard stone scored with grooves and notches, where the troopers in some forgotten battle were said to have sharpened their swords; on the outside wall was a row of rings and stables where the same troopers had tethered their horses. In the cellar there was a collection of large shot,

which there was reason to think had been stored there at the time of the forgotten battle; and with these were a lot of iron buckles, and broken tobacco-pipes of ancient form, which had been dug up in a mound on the hillside through which Jeremy was cutting a drain. A good pint-measure of human teeth, in excellent preservation, had been discovered in the same place, and these were kept in an old tobacco-box. Connected with all this, I suppose, were the names of several of the fields on the farm: one of which was called "The Slaughters"; another, "Horses' Water"; another, "The Guns." And besides these, which reminded one of "old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago," there were two other fields, the names of which were also interesting to me. One, a beautiful meadow with a southern slope, was "Abbot's Vineyard," and the big pond with the aspens beside it was "Benedict's Pool." Of these names the explanation was utterly lost; nor could I invent a theory, for the nearest religious house of pre-Reformation times was many miles

away. The other field was called "Quebec," and the coppice at its upper end was "Monckton Wood."

These latter names I am able to explain. Several of Jeremy's ancestors had been to the wars, among them his great-great-grandfather Silas Jeremy, who had fought under Wolfe at the capture of Quebec, and probably under Monckton in some earlier campaign. In the house there were several mementoes of this man: the identical George II. shilling he had received on enlisting — proving, as Jeremy would often say, that his great-great-grandfather was a "sober" man; a gold watch with a beautifully executed design of the death of Wolfe engraved on the case, said to have been presented to Silas on his return from the wars by the reigning Duke; and, above all, a flint-lock musket, with bayonet attached, which Jeremy asserted his ancestor had used in the battle, but which I judged on examination to have been of French manufacture, and therefore most probably a relic picked up from the battle-field — perhaps the identical musket

along whose barrel some French grenadier had taken aim at the noble heart of Wolfe —who knows?

Another memorial of this ancestor—a pretty obvious one—I can myself claim to have identified. It was an obstinate rule of the farm that the annual "harvest-home" should be held on September 13; and even if the harvest was much belated and only a portion then gathered in, still September 13 was the date, provided only that it did not fall on a Sunday. September 13, I need hardly say, is the anniversary of the battle of the Heights of Abraham. The coincidence had been entirely forgotten by the Jeremys, and was unrecorded in the traditions of our village; but not many days after I had pointed it out, the gossips having been at work in the meantime, an old man came in from a neighbouring parish and told me "as how" his father had talked with a man who knew another man who had been present at the Jeremys' harvest-home in 1760, when Silas Jeremy, who had just come back from foreign parts, and whose

tomb was in the churchyard, sang a song about the taking of Quebec, which the old man's father used to sing—though he himself couldn't remember it—and declared that for all time to come the feast should be held on Quebec Day, and on no other.

This little circumstance, I may say in passing, was the beginning of my friendship with the Jeremy who forms the subject of the present story. My discovery of the coincidence gave him a most exaggerated opinion of my abilities and worth. To quote his own words, it proved me to be "a gentleman as knows what's what" —a characteristic which, so far as I am aware, has never been revealed to anybody else. And Jeremy's good opinion of me was yet further enhanced when he learnt that I had twice visited the Plains of Abraham; that I knew the place by heart; that I had climbed up the goat-path by which his ancestor had scaled the heights, and had laid my head on the spot where Wolfe met his most enviable death. He would have me into his house that very night to tell him all about it;

showed me the George II. shilling and the gold watch; took down the old musket and let me handle it and put it to my shoulder and even pull the trigger; spent two hours in rapt attention while I read out Parkman's account of the battle; and finally summed up the whole campaign and its significance in one sweeping comment, "By Gum, sir, them fellers put their backs into it, and that's *just* what they did!"

The same held true, I should think, of Jeremy's grandfather, to judge by another relic carefully treasured in the house. This was an enormous iron crowbar, the mere lifting of which was a challenge to "put your back into it." With this weapon the Jeremy of that day had successfully defended himself against a crowd of rascals who came out to burn his ricks in '32. Some memories of that fight were still extant in the village, and a bonny fight it must have been. My informant, an eyewitness of the scene, was too nearly imbecile to stand cross-examination; but what he remembered was to the point. Aware of

the impending danger, Jeremy had built his ricks that year within the defences of his courtyard, the walls of which he had rendered unscalable by various devices. It only remained, therefore, to defend the gate; and here were posted Timothy Caine with a maul, Job Henderson with a flail, an unnamed woman with a cauldron of flour to fling in the face of the enemy, and the farmer with the crowbar. These won the day; and more I cannot tell you, because my informant's language, which I could never induce him to vary, became extremely metaphorical at this point: "Master Jeremy, he give 'em pen and ink: pen and ink is what he give 'em with the crowbar, sir, that he did; there was none on 'em wanted hitting twice, no, not one; and, my eye! to see the flour a-flying! What a steam it made! I can see it now."

Agricultural experts who visited our parish, though forced to admire the excellence of Jeremy's farming, were wont to criticise him for being "too slow." Now there, I think, they were distinctly wrong. I have nothing

to say against Agricultural Science: I wish there was more of it; but if it has a weakness it lies in a certain tendency to be "quick" precisely at those points where Jeremy was triumphantly "slow." His slowness was simply the instinctive timing of his action to the movements of Nature, who is also "slow" in relation to yet higher powers. You would often think that he was dawdling; but if you looked into the matter you were sure to find that just then Nature was dawdling too, and that Jeremy was beating her at a waiting game. So, too, if you watched a python creeping from branch to branch or lying coiled in a glass case you would judge it to be the slowest of beasts; but not if you saw it springing on its prey. There was much of the wisdom of the serpent in Mr Jeremy, as there must be in every man who earns his living by battle with the natural order of the world. "I wakes regularly at five o'clock," he said. "But I never gets up till a quarter past. What do I think about in that quarter of an hour? Why, I spends it in *cutting out*."

By "cutting out" he meant the process of mentally arranging the day's work for himself and for every man on the farm. The python on the branch, I imagine, is often engaged in "cutting out." "In farming," he added, for he was giving a lesson, "you ought to cut out fresh every day, and not every week, as some farmers do — though I've knowed them as never cut out at all. And cutting out's a thing you can never learn in books and colleges. It comes by experience—and a light hand. Sometimes you must cut out *rough*, and sometimes you must cut out *fine*—mostly according to the weather and the time o' year —and always *leave a bit somewhere as isn't cut out at all.* And when you've done the cutting out, take a look out o' the window and tap your glass. Do it the minute you jumps out o' bed. And if there's been a change in the wind during the night, cut out *again* while you're pulling your breeches on and tear up what you've cut out already. And don't give no orders to anybody till you've had your breakfast—leastways a cup o' tea; it clears a

man's head and lets you see if you've been making any mistakes. I've often cut out six or seven times between waking and giving the day's orders — what with the tricks of the weather and my head not being as clear as it ought to have been." And I wondered how often Napoleon had done the same thing.

Indeed, if I may venture on a quite innocent paradox, there is a kind of slowness which takes the form of rapidity in reducing one's pace. Such slowness is nothing but inverted speed, and is highly effective in farming, in war, and in many other things. And of Mr Jeremy we may say that whereas, on the one hand, he was extremely slow in the acquisition of new knowledge, on the other he was equally quick to check himself in the application of such knowledge as he possessed already. This gave him, in the eyes of superficial observers, the appearance of being "slow." At the same time it enabled him to make a better thing out of farming than any of his neighbours, some of whom had been trained in Agricultural Colleges.

I have to confess that my acquaintance with Mr Jeremy has not been without a certain demoralising effect. It has corrupted the brightness of many comfortable truths which excellent preceptors taught me in my youth. I will not say that my hold on these truths has altogether vanished; but, thanks to Mr Jeremy's influence, I have learned to see them in so many new lights, and with so many qualifications, that for purposes of platform oratory on all questions connected with the land and its uses I have entirely lost the very little effectiveness I once had. There was a time when if anyone mentioned the land I always wanted to make a speech. Now I feel—what no doubt I ought to have felt then—that I must hold my tongue. To be quite frank, my views on the land have become confused, hesitating, and politically ineffective. That a farmer owning his own land was *cæteris paribus* necessarily better off than a tenant once seemed to me a truth so plain as not to be worth discussion. But if I had to speak on that point now, I should hesitate and

hedge about to a degree which would force any intelligent audience to regard me as a fool. Instead of speaking out loud and strong for peasant proprietorship, I should be thinking all the time of the three peasant proprietors in our neighbourhood—George Corey, Charles Narroway, and Billy Hoare, who are the meanest, the stingiest, the most underhand and generally despicable rascals I have ever met. Were a resolution placed before the meeting in favour of bringing the townspeople back on to the land, I should say in support that while it is infinitely sad to see the real peasantry drifting into the towns, it is yet worse to see people like Prendergast, the ex-draper, drifting out of the towns and setting up as country gentlemen. I should want to tell the audience all about Prendergast and the hideous human packing-case he has built on the opposite hillside; how he swindled the village shopkeeper out of twenty pounds; how he sweats his labourers just as he sweated the poor girls who used to serve behind his counter; how he told me to go to the devil

when I begged him not to build his abominable house where it would spoil the view: and then I should want to add a few details about his personal habits which I am afraid would cause the ladies to walk out of the room. And I should wind up by saying, amid the derisive laughter of the audience, that one reason, at all events, why the real peasants go *into* the towns is to escape from slavery to these pinchbeck fellows who come *out* of the towns. I should want to quote—but I am afraid my courage would have already broken down—what Jeremy once said to me:—"The Dook—when did you ever hear of any man going into the town as worked on *his* estate? But as for this 'ere Prendergast, I wonder the very pigs stop in his stye."

Undoubtedly it was due to Jeremy's influence that I came to appreciate this side of the matter. He also taught me to regard the tenant farmer as superior to all other varieties of his class. I know it is wrong-headed, generalising from a particular case and all that—but I would rather be wrong-headed

with Jeremy, who took a back-view of everything, than right-headed with some forward spirits who treat the land as a *corpus vile* for political experiments. And what logical mind could resist arguments like the following, back-views though they be?

"It takes *two*, sir," said Jeremy, "for to handle the land. A nobleman to own it, and a farmer to cultivate it. There's nothing that gives you *confidence* like having a real gentleman behind you — and the Dook's a real gentleman if ever there was one. And you want confidence in farming—and that's what these 'ere Radicals don't see. I don't want none o' *their* safeguards! Give me the Dook —he's safeguard enough for me! And what safeguard have you when fellers like Prendergast begin buying up the land? Look at *his* tenants—not a real farmer among 'em, no, and not one as can make both ends meet. These little landlords are the men they ought to shoot at, not the big 'uns. Now isn't it a wonderful thing that my family and the Dook's has kept step with one another for a

matter of two hundred years? Eight Dooks in that time and eight Jeremys—one Jeremy to each Dook! But who'll ever keep step with Prendergast? Who'll ever *want* to? Why, I wouldn't be seen walking down the street with him, no, not if you was to give me a thousand pounds. And if he was to offer me his best farm rent-free to-morrow, I'd tell him to go and boil hisself.

"No, sir," he continued, "it don't pay to own the land you farm; and don't you believe them as tells you it does. Leastways, it pays a sight better to farm under a good landlord. Them as can't make farming pay under a landlord, can't make it pay at all. Now look at me and then look at Charley Shott. Me and Charley started the same year, him with 400 acres of his own, and me with 380 acres under the Dook, rented all round at twenty-eight shillings an acre. And where are we both now after thirty years? Why, if Charley's land, and all he's made on it, and all he's put into it, were set at auction to-morrow, I could buy him up twice over! And me paying

over five hundred pounds a year rent for thirty years, and him not paying a penny. How does that come about? Well, you're not a farmer, and you wouldn't understand if I told you. But I'll tell you one thing as perhaps you can understand. It *hurts* the land to break it up. And it hurts the land still more to *sell* it. Now I dare say you never heard of that before."

I confessed that I had not.

"Well, it's a fact. When you break land up it won't *keep*. It goes like rotten apples: first a bit goes rotten here and then a bit there; and the rottenness spreads and runs together. And as to *selling*, I tell you there's something in the land *as knows when you're goin' to sell it, and loses heart.* I've seen the same thing in 'osses. It takes the land longer to get used to a new master than it does a 'oss; and there's some land as never will.

"No, sir, I say again, if you want to make farming *pay*, take a farm on a big estate, one that's never been broke up and's never likely to be, one that's been in the same hands for

hundreds o' years, one that's never been shaken up and messed with and slopped all over with lawyer's ink, and made sour with lawyer's lies. Never mind if the rent's a bit stiffish. Rent never bothered *me*."

I ventured to dissent from these opinions, for I had given lectures on Political Economy, and I knew of at least four different theories of Rent all at variance with Jeremy's—and with one another. Perhaps I should have succeeded better had I known of only one. But, knowing of four, I may have become a little confused in my attempts to confute Farmer Jeremy. Not that this made very much difference. On all questions relating to the nature of land and its uses Jeremy was a mystic, and orthodox Political Economy was as futile to his mind as it was to Mr Ruskin's. Every position I took up was immediately stormed by the rejoinder, "Ah, well, you're not a farmer, and you don't understand." I could not help remembering that I had often been overthrown in more abstruse arguments by the same sort of answer. I might, indeed,

have countered by saying, "Ah, well, Mr Jeremy, you're not an economist, and *you* don't understand." But it occurred to me that the reply would be feeble.

"I tell you," he went on, "that good land *likes* to be high-rented. It sort o' keeps it in humour. Land *likes* to be owned by a gentleman, and keeps its heart up accordin'. Whenever the rent o' land goes down, the quality goes down too. I've noticed it again and again."

I tried to indicate that this last statement was an inversion of cause and effect, but the argument made not the faintest impression on Mr Jeremy, who merely brushed away a fly that had settled on his nose, and continued:

"I never spoke to the Dook but once. I met him one morning riding to hounds with Lady Sybil and Lady Agatha. As soon as he sees me he trots his horse up to where I was standing and holds out his hand. 'Jeremy,' says he, 'I want to shake hands with you. You're a splendid specimen of the British farmer.' 'Thank you, your Grace,' I says;

'and you're a splendid specimen of the British Dook,' for I was never afraid of speaking my mind to anyone. At that his Graee bursts out laughin', and so did Lady Sybil and Lady Agatha too. 'Let me introduce you to my two daughters,' says he. So he introduces me, and I can tell you I stood up to 'em like a man, though I did keep my hat in my hand all the time. 'Well, Jeremy,' says he, 'you've got your farm in tip-top condition'; and then he begins talking about putting up some new buildings, as me and the agent had been talking over before. 'We'll put 'em up next spring,' says his Grace; 'and remember, Jeremy, that in all that concerns the development of this farm you have me behind you.' 'I've never forgotten it, your Grace,' I says, 'and I never shall. And I'm not the only one who remembers it. *The land* remembers it too, your Grace,' I says. 'I hope it does, Jeremy,' says he, 'for I love it.' And I never see a young lady look prettier than Lady Agatha did when she heard her father say them words."

I had heard this story so often from Farmer Jeremy, and always with the same reference to Lady Agatha at the end, that I was familiar with every word of it. He was growing old, and I believe that in the course of the year he managed to tell the story a hundred times over. "I was coming home from market last Saturday," said he, "and a lot of other farmers was in the same compartment with me. We begins talkin' about the Dook, and I happened to tell 'em about that time when I met his Grace with Lady Sybil and Lady Agatha. There was a chap sitting in one corner as didn't belong to our lot, and as soon as he hears the Dook's name mentioned he drops his paper and begins listening. Well, I never see such a rage anywhere as that man got into when I told 'em how I kept my hat in my hand while talking to the ladies. Regular insultin' is what he was; and I can tell you I never came nearer giving a man one in the eye than I did him. I believe I'd ha' done it if there'd been room in the carriage for him to put up his hands and make a square fight on it. I don't say as he

weren't a plucky chap too; for there wasn't a man in the carriage as couldn't ha' knocked his head off with the flat of his hand, if he'd had a mind to. 'Look here, you fellows,' he says, 'you're a lot of blasted idiots, that's what you are. It's because of the besotted ignorance of men like you that England has the worst land-system in the world. Slaverin' and grovellin' before a lot o' rotten Dooks—why, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves! I'll bet that Dook o' yours and his two painted gals was mounted on fine horses and dressed up to the nines.' 'Of course they was,' I says, 'and so they ought to be.' 'Well,' says he, 'who paid for the horses and the clothes—and the paint?' 'Here,' I says, jumping up from my seat, 'you drop the paint, or I'll pitch you out o' that winder.' 'Well, then,' says he, 'who paid for the horses and the clothes?' 'I neither know nor care,' says I; 'so long as they was paid for, it's no business of mine or yourn who paid for 'em.' '*You paid for 'em*, you fool,' says he. 'Oh, indeed,' says I. 'And now, young man, perhaps you'll allow me to give you a word of

advice.' 'Fire away,' says he. 'Well,' I says, 'the next time your missus has a washin' day, you just wait till she's made the copper 'ot, and then jump into it and boil yourself!'"

The "chap" in the railway carriage was by no means the only person to whom Mr Jeremy addressed this drastic advice. It was his usual mode of clinching an argument when his instincts supported a conclusion to which his intelligence could not find the way. This method of arriving at truth was especially useful in regard to politics and theology, in both of which Mr Jeremy took a lively, or even violent, interest. Needless to say, his political aversions were of the strongest, and Mr Lloyd George was the statesman who had to bear the hottest flame of Jeremy's wrath. More than once I have seen him fling his weekly paper on the floor with the words, "I wish this 'ere Lloyd George would jump into the copper and boil hisself"; and on my remarking that I thought this a rather inhuman suggestion, he would wave his arm round the room, in a manner to indicate the entire Liberal Party,

and say, "I wish the whole lot on 'em would jump into coppers and boil themselves." As to theology, I seldom dared to address a hint of my heresies to Mr Jeremy. But on my once saying to another person, in his presence, something to the effect that I did not believe in eternal damnation, he quickly crossed over to where I was sitting, and, giving me a rather ugly dig with his powerful forefinger, said, "Look here! You just jump into the copper and boil yourself." A wise stupidity was the keynote of Mr Jeremy's life.

Another expression reserved for occasions when great emphasis was needed, was "a finished specimen." A thing, in Mr Jeremy's eyes, deserved this title when its general condition was so bad that nothing worse of its kind could be conceived, and the expression accordingly was only used after the ordinary resources of descriptive language had given out. It was applied to persons as well as to things. Mr Lloyd George was, naturally, "a finished specimen": so was the German Emperor: so was Dr Crippen: so was a lady

of uncertain reputation who "had taken a cottage" in the neighbourhood. A wet harvest, a badly built hayrick, a measly pig, a feeble sermon by the curate, were all "finished specimens." Once when the curate, getting gravelled for lack of matter at the end of five minutes—for he was preaching *ex tempore*—abruptly concluded his sermon by promising to complete the subject next week, I heard Jeremy whisper to his wife, "Well, *he*'s a finished specimen, that he is." Nothing irritated the good man so much as an unfinished job, and the fact that a thing was unfinished was precisely what he meant to express when he called it "a finished specimen." A great deal of human language, especially philosophical language, seems to be constructed on the same principle.

Mr Jeremy was a regular church-goer. The Church in his eyes was part of the established order of Nature, on due observance of which the farmer's welfare depends, and merely extended into the next world those desirable results which sound instincts, punctuality, and

"putting your back into it" produced in this. On week-days Mr Jeremy farmed the broad acres of the "Dook"; on Sundays he farmed Palestine, and occasionally drove a straight furrow clean across the back of the Universe. To both operations he applied the same methods, the same instincts, the same ideas. I confess that I have often smiled with the air of a superior person when listening to a highly trained Cathedral choir proclaiming to the strains of great music that "Moab was their washpot"; but when Mr Jeremy repeated the words in the village church I felt that he spoke the truth, and I went away with a clearer conception of Moab than I have ever gained from the works of Kuenen or Cheyne. "Moab," I reflected, "can be no other than the little field on the hillside, where Jeremy washes his sheep in the pool behind the willows." Again, I was morally certain that if Jeremy had lived in the neighbourhood of Edom he would have "cast out his shoe" upon that country, accurately aiming the missile at the head of any rascally Edomite

who happened to be prowling about with a rabbit-snare in his pocket. So too when he shouted "Manasseh is mine"—he always shouted the Psalms—I was sure that Manasseh really was his, in a tenant-farmer way of speaking, and that next Thursday he would begin to rip up Manasseh with his great steam plough, and reap in due course a crop of forty bushels to the acre, paying the "Dook" a high rent for the privilege. Nor was Jeremy making any idle boast when he thundered out his further intentions, which were "to divide Sichem," "to mete out the valley of Succoth," and "to triumph" over Philistia. All this was Pragmatism of the purest water; you were sure he would keep his promise to the letter; you were glad for Sichem and Succoth, which were to be "divided" and "meted out," though perhaps a little sorry for the Philistines, who were to be "triumphed over," that a man like Jeremy should have undertaken the business; but you recognised that no better man for the job could be found anywhere than he. To be sure, Mr Jeremy, although he would have

gladly boiled the whole Liberal Party in coppers, was much too tender-hearted to wish that anybody's little ones should be dashed against the stones; but I believe that in his innermost thought he launched the words against "them tarnation sparrers" and "that plague o' rats." On the whole, no one who listened to Mr Jeremy's repetition of these Psalms could doubt their entire appropriateness as a religious exercise for men such as he, or refrain from hoping that they would never be expunged from the Book of Common Prayer until the last British farmer had gone to church for the last time.

So too with the Creeds. I believed every one of them as recited by Mr Jeremy, and I found the Athanasian the most convincing of them all. The Sundays set down for the use of that Creed—and its use was never omitted in our parish—were the most serious Sundays of the year to Mr Jeremy, and the vigour of his voice and his attitude, and the fervour of his participation, made a spectacle to be remembered. I wish William James might

have seen it before he wrote his *Varieties of Religious Experience*; it would have given him a new chapter. At the very first words Jeremy joined in like a trained sprinter starting for a race; and though the clergyman rattled through the clauses as fast as he could pronounce, or mispronounce, the syllables, the farmer headed him by a word or two from the very first, gradually increasing his lead as the race proceeded until towards the end he was a full sentence to the good. It was evident that to Jeremy's mind, and perhaps to the clergyman's also, a subtle relation existed between the truth of the Creed and the speed with which it could be rendered. Long before the end was in sight, and while Jeremy was still battling with various "incomprehensibles," the rest of the competitors had retired from sheer exhaustion; the children were munching sweets; the lads and lasses were ogling one another at the back of the church; Mrs Jeremy was staring in front of her, wondering perhaps if the careless Susan would remember that onion sauce *always*

went with a leg of mutton on Sundays; while Lady Agatha and Lady Sybil—I grieve to record this, but my historical conscience compels me—sat down. As to those of us who remained attentive to what was going on, our confidence in Catholic Truth gradually took the form of a certainty that the farmer would come in first and the clergyman be nowhere. So it always proved. Standing in the pew behind that of Jeremy, I could see the muscles of his mighty back working up and down beneath the broadcloth of his Sunday coat; and as I looked from him to the easily winded gentleman from Pusey House who was running against him in the chancel, I could not help reflecting how ridiculous, nay, how unsportsmanlike, it was to allow two men so ill matched to compete for the same event. This, no doubt, was the first symptom that, in spite of the standing attitude, I was going to sleep. But before it could happen I was suddenly brought to my senses by the *fortissimo e prestissimo* of Jeremy's conclusion. "He *cannot* be saved," he roared out, banging his

prayer-book down on the book-rest, with a defiant look around him, as though the whole Liberal Party were in church. "He *cannot* be saved,"—and visions of all sorts of people boiling in coppers filled the mental eye.

Jeremy, for a farmer, was the most outrageous optimist I have ever met. He never grumbled, save at politicians, and the worst weather could hardly disconcert him. "You can always turn a bit o' bad weather to good account—if you put your back into it. Yes, it's been a *wet* season, no doubt, but not what I should call a *bad* season. It's true we've made but little hay, and that not good; but the meadows isn't dried up as they was last year, and there'll be feed for the stock in the open most of the winter. I bought fifty new head o' stock last Wednesday — bought 'em cheap of a man as got frightened—and they'll be well fattened by Christmas." Serious setbacks, of course, often occurred; but Jeremy, unlike most of his kind, was not the man to talk about them. "What I believe in," he said, "is not only keeping your own heart up,

but helping your neighbours to keep up theirs. I've no patience with all this 'ere grumbling and growling. Of course, a person has a lot to put up with in farming; but it doesn't do a person no good to be always thinking about that. Pleasant thoughts goes a long way in making money. And I tell you there's money to be made in farming, let folks say what they will. What farmers want is not for Parliament to help 'em, but for Parliament to leave 'em alone. That's why I can't stand this 'ere Liberal Government. Why can't they stop messing wi' things — messing wi' the land, messing wi' the landlords, messing wi' the tenants, messing wi' the farm-labourers? Why can't they leave it all alone and stick to what they understand, if there's anything they *do* understand, which I doubt? No, sir; I don't want their laws, good or bad. Give me the custom of the county, and a good bench o' magistrates, and a cheerful disposition, and a farmyard full o' muck, and I've got all I want to make farming *pay*—always provided you put your back into it."

But during the long-continued rain of last summer I could not help observing that Jeremy, in spite of his fidelity to these principles, was making an effort to keep up his heart. Not only was his hay ruined, but the finest crop of wheat he had ever raised was sprouting in the ear. There was sickness among the sheep and the pigs; and the standing crop in his great orchard was sold to a middleman for a quarter the usual price. But Jeremy made no complaint. Only, meeting the clergyman one day in the road, he said, "Parson, it's high time you put up the prayer for fine weather." Jeremy had a firm belief in the power of prayer—and especially of this one.

On the first occasion when this prayer was used in the village church I was present in my usual place behind Jeremy. As the prayer proceeded it was evident that the farmer was putting his back into it. I could see the movement of the deltoid muscles, and I watched a great crease form itself in the lower portion of his coat and gradually creep upwards until it formed a straight line from one

shoulder-blade to the other. When the prayer concluded Jeremy said "Amen *and* Amen!" with the utmost fervour; and the crease in his coat slowly disappeared. I am afraid I was more occupied in watching this crease than in recalling the lesson that was taught to us sinners when it pleased Jehovah to "drown all the world, except eight persons."

During the next ten days the rain fell with increasing volume and fury: the ditches were in flood; the roads were watercourses, and much damage was done on Jeremy's farm. Meeting him at this time, I said in the course of conversation, perhaps foolishly, "Mr Jeremy, the prayer for fine weather seems to have done us very little good." For a moment he looked at me rather angrily, as though suspecting that some lukewarmness on my part had deprived the prayer of its due effect. Then he checked himself and seemed to reflect. "No," he said at length, "it's done us no good at all. But what else can you expect, *with all them gigglin' wenches at the back of the church*?"

For three miserable weeks the heavens were

deaf to our entreaties, and matters began to look pretty black. A change for the better was confidently expected with the new moon; and though I have never been able to discover the origin of the superstition, nor a reason for it, I found myself as expectant as any of my neighbours—like that other great philosopher, who didn't believe in ghosts, but was desperately afraid of them. However, the new moon brought no relief to our sorry plight—and the superstition lives on in our parish, unimpaired. Ominous rumours about the end of the world spread from cottage to cottage, and our wits were busy in discovering the culprit whose misdeeds had precipitated the coming catastrophe. Most of us were persuaded that it was Tom Mellon the waggoner, a good workman but an irredeemable drunkard; and Tom, who was aware of our suspicions, became thoroughly scared. For the first time in twenty years Tom kept away from the public-house when his wages were paid, and went to bed sober but terribly depressed on Saturday night. On Monday morning, Mrs

Mellon, whose face for once bore no trace of bruises, informed our cook that "her master had had a dreadful bad night. He would keep jumping out o' bed and going to the window, to look into the sky and *see if anything was up.*" Tom had communicated his fears, when in an early stage of development, to his boon companion, Charley Stamp the ex-roadman, whose old-age pension went the way of Tom's wages and swelled the revenues of the public-house by the regular sum of five shillings per week. These two Arcadians, as they sat over their cups, concerted a plan, composed mainly of bad language, for defeating the ends of justice on the Day of Doom; and on the Saturday night previous to the one last mentioned came home together abominably intoxicated, waving their hats and roaring out as they went up the village that they were "ready" for Judgment—"with a tooral-ri-looral, and a rooral-li-ray." Subsequent events proved that neither of them was "ready." Tom's courage, as we have seen, went to pieces on hearing it definitely whispered that the universe was about to be

wiped out in consequence of his bad habits. Charley's downfall was even more sudden. In the small hours of the very morning after his performance in the village street it happened that Farmer Jeremy's bull, scenting a cow in a neighbouring pasture, expressed his sentiments by emitting a loud bellow. The sound travelled to Charley's cottage, and, descending the chimney, mingled with his drunken dreams. "Get up, missis," he shouted, "get up; *the trumpet's sounding!*" and rushing into the garden he began to howl like a jackal. The howls woke the village, and a score of terrified souls, myself among them, convinced that "it was come at last," looked out of their windows—only to find that a lovely morning was breaking over the hills. Fine weather returned soon after; and I am sorry to say that with its coming the moral reformation which had begun so hopefully in Tom and Charley, and spread to several less hardened sinners in our village, was terminated at a stroke.

It must have been some four or five days

before the change came in the weather that I took advantage of a bright interval in the evening to walk across the summit of the hill which shades my house from the setting sun. I pushed on into the upland until the dusk had fallen, and found myself at last in a deserted quarry—a long familiar spot, where in old days I used to meet Snarley Bob. There I sat down on the very heap of stones on which he sat as he talked to me of the stars. In due time the stars came out, and I wondered in which of them the great spirit of my old friend had found its abode. I imagined it was Capella; why I know not, unless it be that Capella was the star to which Snarley's finger often pointed when he lifted up his voice about the things on high. This has nothing to do with my story, and I mention it here only because I find myself wondering at this moment how spirits so diverse as those of Snarley Bob and Tom Mellon could have breathed the same atmosphere and drawn their sustenance from the same environment.

I lingered in the quarry pondering my memories until the great rain-clouds, creeping up from different points of the horizon, had met in the zenith and every star had disappeared. A sullen rain began to fall, and black darkness was over the hill.

I turned homewards, reflecting that it might not be easy to find my way by the sheep-tracks on so dark a night. I remembered that on the summit of the hill, some two miles from where I was, there stood an isolated barn surrounded by sheds for the shelter of cattle. From this point the way down into the village could hardly be missed, and thither accordingly I turned my steps. With some difficulty I found the barn; for the ways were wet and in some places impassable, and the night, as I have said, was very dark.

On nearing the barn I was astonished to notice a gleam of light issuing from the half-closed door. I approached, and as I did so I was yet more astonished, and a little scared, to hear the loud and lamentable tones of a human voice. I listened, and at once recognised

the voice as Jeremy's, though I could not hear what he was saying nor explain to myself the preternatural solemnity of the tone. It was not a cry of pain, nor that of a man in need of human help. I drew yet nearer, and it became plain to me that Jeremy was praying.

Curiosity tempting me on, I crept up to the barn and looked in through the partly opened door. This is what I saw. Kneeling on the floor towards the further side of the barn, with a lighted stable-lantern suspended over his head, was Jeremy. His back was towards me, but I could see that he had a book in his hand. A glance was sufficient to show me that I was looking at a man in wrestle with his God. I knew the signs of Jeremy's earnestness; and they were there—intense, unmistakable. Never have I witnessed a more solemn spectacle, and, had not something held me spell-bound to the spot, I should have retreated in very shame of my intrusion.

At the moment when I first caught sight of his figure Jeremy was silent. His head was

bowed on his chest, his feet were drawn close together, and his right hand, holding the book —which I saw was the Book of Common Prayer—drooped on the ground. I noted the head of a steel rat-trap protruding from the big side-pocket of his coat. I also remember how the bright nails of his boots, of which the soles were turned towards me, glittered in the light of the lantern.

Presently Jeremy raised the book, turned over the leaves—for he had lost the place—slightly readjusted his position, and in a deep and solemn voice again began to pray. And this was his prayer:

> "O Almighty Lord God, who for the sin of man didst once drown all the world, except eight persons, and afterward of thy great mercy didst promise never to destroy it so again: we humbly beseech thee, that although we for our iniquities have worthily deserved a plague of rain and waters, yet upon our true repentance thou wilt send us such weather, as that we may receive the fruits of the earth in due season; and learn both by thy punishment to amend our lives, and for thy clemency to give thee praise and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*"

It was enough. Quickly and silently as I could I slipped away into the darkness, filled with a sense of the sacrilege of my intrusion and the solemnity of the hour. I have listened in my time to many prayers of many men; I have heard the Almighty flattered, complimented, instructed in the metaphysics of his own nature, and insulted by the grovelling and insincere self-depreciation of his own creatures; I have heard him talked at, and talked about, by cowardly men-pleasers who had no more religion than a rhinoceros; and I have wondered much at the patience of heaven with all this detestable eloquence. I have heard also the short and stumbling prayers of the honest, of the Salvationist kneeling in the thoroughfare of a town full of sin, of the mother with her arms round the neck of a dying child; but none even of these have dealt so shrewd a thrust at my self-satisfaction as did the prayer of Farmer Jeremy. What strange secrets, I thought, are hidden in the human heart! Verily, the ways of man, like the ways of God, are past finding out.

Now, it so happened that I had given Jeremy a promise that I would, that very night, join him at supper and "have a chat." I would gladly have found an excuse if I could. But it was not easy to excuse oneself to Jeremy; his discernments were keen. Moreover, I half feared that he might have discovered my footsteps outside the barn; and I knew that if he had, the only wise course was to face the situation, tell the truth, and have it out. It was soon evident, however, that he had discovered nothing; and I, of course, kept my counsel.

I entered the farm kitchen and found Mrs Jeremy awaiting her husband by the fire. "Master's late in coming home," she said. "He's gone up the hill with a lantern, to set traps in the Grey Barn. He says it's full o' rats. But he ought to have come back half an hour ago."

"He'll be back soon," I answered; and a moment later I heard the ring of his boots on the stone flags outside.

Entering the room, Jeremy, without greeting

me, walked across the floor and tapped the barometer on the wall. "It's rising," he said. "I thought it would by the look of the moon last night. Well, given a bit o' fine weather now, we shall not do so badly after all. The wheat's less sprouted than I thought it was; just a little down in 'the Guns,' but none at all in 'Quebec.' Please God, we shall get forty-five to the acre, up there; and all in tip-top condition."

"How are the root-crops?" I asked.

"Looking splendid; couldn't be better. You see, they're all on the high ground."

"Did you set your traps?" said Mrs Jeremy.

"I did. But there's too many rats for trappin' to do much good. We must try this 'ere new poison. That'll cook their gooses for 'em, according to what I hear."

After supper the conversation turned once more on the weather. "It's bound to mend," said Jeremy; "there's a rising glass, and the wind's gone round to the north-west since I went up the hill. Just look out o' this winder at them clouds drifting across the sky. And

they're a lot higher up than they were this afternoon. And I tell you these 'ere prayers as we've been puttin' up in church are bound to do *some* good, though they mayn't do *all* the good as we want. I've noticed it again and again, both wet seasons and droughty."

"The prayer of a righteous man availeth much," said Mrs Jeremy, who, notwithstanding her mental wanderings during the Athanasian Creed, was a pious soul.

I was sorry the conversation had taken this turn, being disinclined to discuss the subject just then. But Jeremy was only too ready to take the cue.

"Yes," he said; "and the prayer of a sinner is sometimes *almost* as good as the prayer of a righteous man; though, mind you, I don't say it's *quite* as good. I'm a bit of a sinner myself; but I've had lots of answers to prayer in my life. *Lots*, I tell you. You see, it's this way. My belief is, that you've no business to want a thing unless you're ready to pray for it. Of course, you can't always tell what you ought to want and what you oughtn't—that's

the difficulty. But my plan is to pray for everything as I wants and then leave the Lord to sort out the bad from the good. There's a Collect in church as puts it in that way. Mind you, I wouldn't pray for anything as I *knowed* were bad. There'd be no sense in that. And as for fine weather, all points to that being *good*, and your prayer stands a fair chance of being answered. Of course, it may be bad for reasons we don't know about; though I don't think it is *myself*. So it's right to pray for it. Pray for everything you want—that's what I says; and leave the rest to the Lord."

Jeremy would no doubt have said much more, for he was a great talker when started on his favourite themes, and this was one of them. But we were interrupted by a cry from Mrs Jeremy at the other side of the table. It was simply, "Oh dear!"

Looking up, I saw that she was leaning forward with her face buried in her hands, sobbing violently.

"Darn my gaiters!" said Jeremy, "I'm

nought but a fool. I oughtn't to ha' talked about them things before my missus. I never do; but something's made me forget myself to-night. You see, it's reminded her of our trouble."

I did not understand this last remark. But I asked no question, being too much occupied in watching the infinite tenderness of the good man as he sought to comfort his wife. I draw a veil over that. "Now go to bed, there's a good girl, and think no more about it," was the end of what he had to say.

Mrs Jeremy retired, the tears standing in her eyes. She shook hands with me, but didn't speak.

Jeremy resumed his seat, lit his pipe, and began to explain. His voice trembled and almost broke down with the first sentence.

"You see," he said, waving his hand towards the fire, "it's a childless hearth. . . . It hasn't always been. There was one, once—fifteen years ago. He was six years of age—as bright a little nipper as ever you see. Oh yes, he said his prayers: said one too many, that

he did. . . . O my God! . . . Well, it was this way. It was one Christmas Eve, and a young lady as we had for his governess had been telling the little nipper all about Father Christmas—I don't blame *her*; she's never got over it any more than we have, and never will— . . . all about Father Christmas, as I was saying; and he drinks it all in with his wide little eyes, as though it was Gospel truth. 'I'll tell Father Christmas to bring me something real nice,' he says. So just before they put him to bed that night he goes to that open fireplace, where you're sitting now, and pops his head up the chimney, and calls out, 'Father Christmas, please bring me to-night a magic lantern, a pair of roller skates, four wax candles, and a box o' them chocolates with the little nuts inside 'em, for Jesus Christ sake, Amen.' Then he goes away from the fire, and I says, 'All right, nipper, I'll bring 'em,' from behind that door, in a voice to make him believe as Father Christmas was answering. Well, he starts to go to bed; but just as he reached them stairs in the passage he runs

back, and pops his little head up the chimney again. 'Father Christmas,' he says, 'don't forget the little nuts in the chocolates. I don't want none o' them pink 'uns.' And, O my God! he'd hardly spoken the words when more than half a hundredweight of blazing soot comes slathering down the chimney and falls right on the top of him just where he stood. I tell you there never was a thing seen like it since this world began! The room was filled with black smoke in a second; we were all blinded; we could neither breathe nor see. We couldn't see him, we couldn't find him; and we all stumbled up against one another; and the missus fell insensible on the floor. And him screaming with pain all the time—and I tell you I couldn't find him, though I rushed like a madman all over the room and groped everywhere, and put my hands into the very fire! Then I went too—dropped like a stone. It was all over in a minute. They pulled the rest of us out in the nick of time: but the poor little nipper was burned to death. . . ."

Farmer Jeremy rose from his seat and went to the window. He was shaking all over; but I averted my glance, for it is a terrible thing to see a strong man in the agony of his soul, and the eyes cannot bear it long. "The clouds are breaking," he said; "and, please God, I'll cut 'the Slaughters' to-morrow. But there's one harvest as will never be reaped: and there's one cloud that will never break. Not till the Resurrection Morn. Ah me!"

On the lovely afternoon of an autumn Sunday, about a fortnight after these things, I met Jeremy in the fields, walking the round with his terrier dog.

"Grand weather for farmers," I cried.

"Grand it is, sir," he answered, "and let us be thankful for it."

"Yes," I said; "it has been long enough in coming, and is all the more welcome now it has come."

I felt that the words struck the wrong note; or rather they struck none at all, where a note of music was needed. But I knew not what

else to say. Jeremy with all his reserve was less timid and more affluent than I.

"Have you never thought, sir," he said, drawing near to me, "what brought the fine weather?"

I hesitated and was silent.

"Then I'll tell you," said he. "*The power o' prayer.*"

That very day I had been reading a book on Primitive Religion; and as I parted from Jeremy a question flashed through my mind. "May it not be," I asked myself, "that Primitive Religion is the only religion that has ever existed, or will exist, in the world?"

WHITE ROSES

Of all the conversations of the learned, those in which History and Philosophy maintain the dialogue are probably the most instructive. Such a conversation I was fortunate enough to hear not long ago at the dinner-table of a friend; and the occasion was the more interesting inasmuch as the Philosopher of the party was led by a turn of the argument to lay aside his mantle and assume the rôle of the story-teller; thereby providing us with a valuable comment on the very philosophy with which his own illustrious name has been long associated.

We had been talking during dinner about a certain Expedition to the South Seas undertaken by the British Government in the eighteenth century; and the Historian had

just finished a most surprising narration of the facts, based on his recent investigation of unpublished documents, when our Hostess glanced at the clock, and rising from her chair gave the signal to the ladies to depart.

When we had resumed our places the Professor of Philosophy said to the Historian:

"I wish you would tell us what in your opinion it was that caused the Expedition to turn out such an utter failure."

"The Expedition failed," said the Historian, "because the commander was not allowed to select his own crews. The Government of the day was corrupt, and insisted on manning the ships with men of its own choosing. Some were diseased; others were criminals; many had never handled a rope in their lives. Before the fleet had doubled Cape Horn one-third of the crews had perished, and the rest were mutinous. The enterprise was doomed to failure from the start."

"The whole planet is manned in the same manner," said the Pessimist, as he helped himself to one of our Host's superlative cigars.

"I'm sorry for the Commander, whoever he is."

"What precisely do you mean?" said the Professor of Philosophy, holding a lighted match to the end of the Pessimist's cigar.

"I mean," said the Pessimist, "that the prospects of the Human Expedition can't be very bright so long as Society has to put up with anybody and everybody who happens to be born. I suppose there *is* a Human Expedition," he went on. "At least, *you* have written as though there were. But who selects the crew? Nobody. They come aboard as they happen to be born, and the unfortunate Commander has to put up with them as they come—broken men, jail-deliveries, invalids, sea-sick land-lubbers, and Heaven knows what. Who in his senses would put to sea with such a crowd? Humanity is always in a state like that of your Expedition when it doubled Cape Horn—incompetent, mutinous, or sick unto death. And what else can you expect in view of the conditions under which we all arrive on the planet?"

The Host now glanced uneasily at the Professor of Philosophy, whose treatise on *The World Purpose* was famous throughout three continents. The Professor was visibly arming himself for the fray: he had just filled his claret-glass with port.

"Remember," said the Host, "that we must join the ladies in twenty minutes at the utmost."

"I'm not going to argue," replied the Philosopher, after a resolute sip at his port; "I'm going to tell you a story."

"Tell it in the drawing-room," said the Son of the House, who had taken his pretty cousin down to dinner, and was a little exhilarated by that and by the excellence of his father's wine; "that is to say,"—and he spoke eagerly, as if a bright idea had struck him,—"that is to say, of course, if it will bear telling in the presence of ladies."

There was a roar of laughter, and the Son of the House blushed to the roots of his hair.

"I am inclined to think," said the Professor, "that my story, so far from being unsuitable

for the ladies, will be intelligible to no one else."

"We'll join the ladies at once," said the Host, "and hear the Professor's story."

The Pessimist, who was fond of talking, now broke in. "That," he said, "is most attractive, but not quite fair to me. I should like to finish what I have begun. And I doubt if my views will be quite in place in the drawing-room. Besides, the Professor must finish his port. I was only going to say," he went on, "that the having to put up with all that comes in human shape is a very serious affair. It seems to me that we all arrive in the world like dumped goods. Nobody has 'ordered' us, and perhaps nobody wants us. Our parents wanted us, did you say? Well, I suppose our parents wanted children; but it doesn't follow that they wanted *you* or *me*. Somebody else might have filled the book as well, or better. Our birth is a matter of absolute chance. For example, my father has often told me how he met my mother. There was a picnic on a Swiss lake.

My father's watch was slow, and when he arrived at the quay the boat that carried his party was out of sight. It so happened that there was another party—people my father didn't know—going to another island, and seeing him disconsolate on the quay they took pity on him and made him go with them. It was in that boat that he first met my mother. The moral is obvious. If my father's watch had kept better time I should never have been in existence. ["A jolly good thing, too," whispered the Son of the House.] Neither would my six brothers, nor any of our descendants to the *n*th generation. Well, that's how the whole planet gets itself *manned*. That's how the crew is 'chosen.' And that's why the Expedition gets into trouble on rounding Cape Horn."

"It's a capital introduction to my story," said the Professor, in whom, after his second claret-glass of port, *The World Purpose* had assumed a new intensity. "I wish the ladies could have heard it."

"I venture to think," said our Host, "that

the ladies will understand the story all the better for not having heard the introduction. You see, I am assuming that the story is a good one—which is as much as to say that no introduction is needed."

"Thank you," said the Professor.

"I say," broke in the Son of the House, "I say, Professor, it's a pity you didn't take that question up in *The World Purpose*. That's an awfully good point of the Pessimist's, and a jolly difficult one to answer, too. I should like to see you tackle it. Why, I once heard the Pater here say to the Mater——"

"We'll go upstairs," said our Host.

"About ten years ago," the Professor began, "I was travelling one night in a third-class carriage to a town on the North-east Coast. My two companions in the compartment were evidently mother and daughter. The mother had a singularly beautiful and intelligent face; and the daughter, who was about twelve years old, resembled her. They were dressed in good taste, without rings or finery, and, so

far as I am able to judge such things, without expense.

"Prior to the departure of the train from the London terminus, I had noticed the two walking up and down the platform and looking into the carriages, apparently endeavouring to find a compartment to themselves. They did not succeed, and finally entered the compartment where I was. Whether I ought to have been flattered by this, or the reverse, I knew not.

"I could see they wanted to be alone, and I felt a brief impulse to leave them to themselves and go elsewhere. It would have been a chivalrous act; but whether from indolence, or curiosity, or some other feeling, I let the impulse die, and remained where I was.

"The girl began immediately to arrange cushions for her mother in the corner of the carriage; and from the solicitude she showed, I gathered that the mother, though to all appearance in health, was either ill or convalescent. By the time I had come to this conclusion the train was already in motion,

or I verily believe I should have obeyed my first impulse and left the carriage. I am glad, however, that I did not.

"When all had been arranged I noticed that the two had settled themselves in the attitude of lovers, their hands clasped, the girl resting her head on the mother's shoulder and gazing into her face from time to time with a look of infinite tenderness. And it was some relief to me to observe that, lover-like, they seemed indifferent to my presence.

"I was reading a book, though I confess that my eyes and mind would constantly wander to the other side of the carriage. I am not a sentimental person, and scenes of sentiment are particularly objectionable to my temper of mind; but for once in my life I was overawed by the consciousness that I was in the presence of deep and genuine emotion. Finally, I gave up the effort to read; a strange mental atmosphere seemed to surround me; I fell into a reverie, and I remember waking suddenly from a kind of

dream, or incoherent meditation on the pathos and tragedy of human life.

"I looked at my companions and I saw that both were weeping. The girl was in the same position as before. The mother had turned her face away, and was looking out into the blackness of the night. Tear after tear rolled down her cheek.

"They must have become conscious that I was observing them, though God knows I had little will to do so. I took up my book and pretended to read; and I knew that an effort was being made, that tears were being checked, that some climbing sorrow was being held down. Presently the lady said, speaking in a steady voice—

"'Do you know the name of the station we have just passed?'

"I told her the name of the station; asked if I should raise the window; spoke to the girl; offered an illustrated paper, and so on through the usual preliminaries of a traveller's talk. The answers I received were such as one expects from people of charming manners.

But nothing followed, for a time, and I again took up my book.

"The book I was reading, or pretending to read, was a volume of the Ingersoll Lectures, bearing on the back the title *Human Immortality.* Once or twice I noticed the eyes of the woman resting on this; but I was greatly surprised when, in one of the pauses when I laid down the book, she said—

"'Would you mind my asking you a question?'

"'Certainly not.'

"'Do you believe in the Immortality of the Soul?'

"As a teacher of philosophy I am accustomed to leading questions at all sorts of inopportune moments, but never in my life was I so completely taken aback. However, I collected my thoughts as best I could, and, though the subject is one on which I never like to speak without prolonged preparation, I briefly told her my opinions on that great problem, as you may find them expressed in my published works. Possibly

I spoke with some fervour; the more likely, because I spoke without preparation. She listened with great attention; and as for the young girl, her face was lit up with a look of intelligent eagerness which, had I seen it for one moment in my own class-room, would have rewarded me for the labour of a long course of lectures.

"I had still much to say when the train drew up at the platform of St Beeds.

"'I'm sorry not to hear more,' said the lady, 'but this is our destination.'

"'And there's Dad!' cried the girl.

"A man in working clothes stood at the carriage-door.

"'Good-bye,' said the woman, warmly shaking me by the hand; 'you have been most kind to me.'

"'Good-bye,' said the daughter; 'you're a dear old dear!"

"And with that she threw her arms round my neck and kissed me fervently three or four times. I was greatly surprised, but not altogether displeased.

"They were evidently a most affectionate family. As the train moved off the three stood arm in arm before the carriage-door.

"'Got two sweethearts to-night, sir,' said the man.

"'And without jealousy,' said I. 'I congratulate you on each of them.'

"'I hope you'll forgive my daughter,' he said; 'she's an impulsive little baggage.'

"'She may repeat the offence the next time we meet,' I replied; and we all laughed.

"It was a joyful ending to what had been, in some respects, a painful experience."

"I don't see the point of your story, Professor; and I am at a loss to imagine what it has to do with my introduction." This from the Pessimist.

"The story has only begun," said the Professor, who was sipping his tea.

"Those kisses at the end were jolly hard lines on a man who dislikes sentiment," said the Son of the House.

"I didn't find them so," answered the Pro-

fessor. "But remember, they were only the kisses of a child."

"The best sort," growled the Pessimist.

"True," said our Hostess. "The judgments of children are the judgments of God. But let the Professor go on."

"It was seven or eight months later," the Professor resumed, "when on opening the *Times* one morning my attention was caught by an item of news relating to the town at which my two companions had alighted from the train. The news itself was of no importance, but the name of the town printed at the head of the paragraph strangely arrested me, and served to recall with singular vividness the incident of my former journey. I found myself repeating, in order and minute detail, everything that had happened in the carriage, some of the particulars of which I had forgotten till that moment. The end of it was that I became possessed with a strong desire to visit St Beeds, though I had no connections whatever with the place, and had never stayed

there in my life. I knew, of course, that it was an interesting old town, with a famous Cathedral, and I remember persuading myself at the time, and indeed telling my wife, that I ought to visit that Cathedral without further delay. As the day wore on the impulse grew stronger, and eventually overpowered me. I travelled down to St Beeds that night, and put up at one of the principal hotels.

"The next morning was spent in the usual manner of sight-seers in an ancient town. Reserving the Cathedral for the afternoon, I visited the old wall and the dismantled quays, and wandered among the narrow streets, reading history, as my habit is, from the monuments with which the place abounded. About noon I found my way to the spacious market-place, and began inspecting the beautiful front of the old Town Hall.

"I suddenly became aware of a man on the opposite pavement, who was watching me with some interest. What drew my attention to him was a large mass of white roses which he was carrying in a basket; for, as you know, I

have been for many years an enthusiastic rose-grower, and there is nothing which attracts the mind so rapidly as any circumstance connected with one's hobby. The man was dressed in good clothes; and it was this that prevented me at first from recognising him as the person who had met my two companions at the station seven months before.

"Seeing that I had observed him, he crossed the street.

"'You remember me?' he said. 'Well, I have been looking for you all over the town. Had I known your name I should have asked at the hotels.'

"'But how did you know I had arrived?' I asked.

"'My wife told me you were here.'

"'She must have seen me, then,' I said.

"'Yes, she saw you. She saw you arrive last night at the station. And she saw you later, standing under an electric lamp, in front of the Cathedral.'

"This struck me as odd, for I had purposely waited till near midnight before going to the

Cathedral, that I might see the exterior in the light of the moon; and I had been confident that not a soul was about.

"'How is she?' I asked, for I remembered my previous impression that she was an invalid.

"'Oh, much better,' he answered; 'in fact, quite restored. It's a great comfort.'

"'It was very kind of her to send you to look for me,' I said. 'Perhaps I shall have the pleasure of seeing her later on in the day—and your daughter as well. You remember I congratulated you on your two sweethearts?'

"'Yes,' he answered, 'and you were not far wrong in that. But wouldn't you like to take a turn round the old town first? It's a wonderful place and full of interest. And I know it through and through.'

"I was greatly puzzled by his manner. His speech and address were certainly remarkable for a working man; and I confess that for a moment the thought crossed my mind that he was some sort of impostor, and that I

should be well advised to have nothing to do with him. I suppose it was his basket of roses that reassured me.

"'Well,' I said, 'I've seen a good deal already. But I've no objection to seeing it all again. I'll put myself in your hands.'

"'Splendid!' he cried. 'It's an ideal day, and I'm hungering for sunlight and beauty, and thirsting for the peace of ancient memories. And it will please my wife to know that I've taken you round. What do you say to going up the river first? There's a glorious reach beyond the bridge. And the sun's in the right position to give you the best view of the Cathedral.'

"'Nothing would please me better,' said I; and we set off at once toward the river.

"On passing a certain building he bade me carefully examine the roof, the form of which was remarkable. While I was engaged in so doing, unconscious for a moment of his presence, I suddenly seemed to hear him groan behind me; and turning round I saw that he was holding tight to the iron railings

on the other side of the foot-walk, and swaying his body backward and forward, as though he were in pain.

"'Are you ill?' I asked, in some alarm.

"'Not at all. This is just my way of resting when I'm tired. Come along.'

"'That's a splendid lot of roses in your basket,' I said, as we took our places in the boat, he sculling and I steering. 'Frau Carl Druschki, unless I'm much mistaken.'

"'Yes. I grew them on my allotment. I'm taking them home to my wife.'

"For some time we talked roses. He had a theory of pruning, which differed from mine, and led to a good deal of argument. Finally, he dropped his sculls, and, taking a piece of paper from his pocket, drew on it the diagram of a rose-bush pruned according to his method. We had forgotten the Cathedral.

"I took his drawing and began to criticise. 'Oh!' he said, 'let's drop it. We're missing one of the noblest sights in England. Look at that!' And he pointed to the heights.

"As we dropped down the river half an

hour later, my companion, who had been silent for some time, again broke out on the subject of roses. 'Rose-growing is a thing that takes time and patience and thought,' he said. 'More perhaps than it's worth. If it were not for my wife, I should give it up. She's desperately fond of roses.'

"'That's the best of reasons for not giving it up,' I answered. 'I happen to be a great admirer of your wife.'

"'That's another link between us,' said he. 'She's the best wife man ever had. She's worthy of all the admiration you can give her.'

"She's worthy of all the roses you can grow for her,' I said.

"'By God, she is!'" he answered with an emphasis that startled me.

"We grew confidential, and a story followed. He told me that he was the illegitimate son of a baronet; that his father had made him an allowance to study art in London; that he had married his model, in opposition to the wishes of his father; that the baronet had thereupon

thrown him over for good and all; that he had failed to make a living by his original art; that he had got an engagement with a great furnishing-house as a skilled painter; that he was earning four pounds a week in doing artistic work in rich men's houses and elsewhere; that he was now engaged in restoring some fifteenth-century frescoes in a parish church. His wife earned money too, though he did not tell me how, and his daughter was being trained as a singer. 'We're all more or less in art,' he said, 'and we are a very happy family.'

"By this time we were back at the landing-place, and as the man stepped ashore he said: 'It's about time I took these roses to my wife. We'll just walk along to where I live, and I'll show you the rest of the sights afterwards. I'll take you to the Cathedral when the afternoon service is over.'

"As we walked through the streets the man kept up an incessant stream of talk, pointing to this and that, and discoursing with great eagerness on the history and antiquities of the

town. It struck me as strange that he never waited for any answer but passed from one thing to another without a pause. Presently we stopped in front of a small house, one of a row of villas.

"'This is where I live,' he said, and stopped on the doorstep.

"'Good!' I cried; 'and now you will take me in and reintroduce me to your charming wife.'

"'I'm sorry,' he answered, 'but the thing's quite impossible.'

"I was so startled by this unexpected answer that, without thinking, I blurted out the question, 'Why?'

"'*Because*,' he said, '*she's in her coffin. She died at four o'clock this morning.*'

"At the words he sank down on his doorstep, put the basket of roses on his knees and bowed himself over them in a passion of tears.

"The door opened, and the young girl, who had been with me in the train, ran down the steps. Sitting down beside her father she put

her arms round his neck and said, 'Daddy, Daddy, don't cry!'"

The Professor ceased and there was a long pause.

"Did you discover," said the Pessimist at length, "why the two were weeping in the train?"

"No need to ask that," said our Hostess. "The woman had received sentence of death."

"Did you ever follow it up?" said the Historian. "What, for example, became of the young girl?"

"*She was married to my eldest son last month*," said the Professor.

"I knew the Pessimist's introduction would not be needed," said our Host.

"Nevertheless, it was the introduction that reminded me of the story," said the Professor. "And now," he continued, "can anyone here explain to me the strange conduct of the man with the white roses? For I confess that I can find no place for it in any system of Psychology known to me."

At this question the Son of the House, who for some reason had become the gravest member of the party, looked up and seemed about to speak. But as he raised his eyes they met the bright glance of his pretty cousin, on whose cheek there was a tear. And when the Son of the House saw that, the impulse to speech died within him.

No one else ventured an explanation. But my impression was that there were two persons in the room to whom the strange conduct of the man with the white roses presented no enigma.

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